

OCTOBER 27, 2015 ₹100

A Times of India publication

F

56th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

THE UN-BAN ISSUE

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NA

*Be
unstoppable*

ANUSHKA
SHARMA

TAKES ON
THE WORLD,
ONE MILESTONE
AT A TIME



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FASHION'S BIG
OBSESSION WITH
THE BODY

THE #1
GOLDEN
RULE FOR
GREAT
SEX

LOVE
PALMISTRY
101

BEAUTY AT
WHAT PRICE?



WATCH BEHIND THE
SCENES OF THIS
COVER SHOOT.
FOR INSTRUCTIONS
TURN TO PAGE 38

EDITOR'S LETTER



When you censor somebody, you drown out her voice. But you also lose your own power to hear—the truth.

The pace at which we are becoming a deaf-mute nation (political correctness be damned) terrifies. Femina@56 marks its anniversary by questioning, countering and defying all that we are told to do, say, and accept. The reason you shouldn't let your life be bleeped out is inside.

Our cover story, The Big Ban Theory, is a series of columns and open letters written by well-known

**THE BIG BAN THEORY IS
A SERIES OF COLUMNS AND
OPEN LETTERS** WRITTEN BY
WELL-KNOWN FACES FROM
THE WORLD OF CINEMA, ART,
PUBLISHING, FASHION AND
ENTERTAINMENT.

faces from the world of cinema, art, publishing, fashion and entertainment. This special section is authored by Nandita Das, Khalid Mohamed, Wendell Rodricks, Wendy Doniger, Ram Gopal Varma, Vasu Primlani, Rocky Singh and Mayur Sharma, Cyrus Broacha, Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, Alka Pande, Suresh Menon, Paromita Vohra, Shruti Seth, Kiran Manral, Anu Menon, and Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan.

Trolls, hooligans, self-righteous and self-proclaimed

community leaders and government-sponsored ban imposers should definitely read this and send us their feedback. You see, we don't want to muzzle out anybody's point or counterpoint.

Since bans come heavy on the style industry, our special focus is on nudity in fashion. Celebrated designers like Abu-Sandeep, Tarun Tahiliani, Sabyasachi and JJ Valaya give their take on the body beautiful and how it spurs on their creativity. Speaking of creativity, the Craftsvilla.com Femina Ethnic Designer of the Year 2015 hunt has just got done. The talent we have sifted through is brilliant, and while there can only be one winner, we're sure the others in the race will find their glory too.

Back to the anniversary issue, as our theme outlines the controversial and beautiful, I want you to know that there is just one thing that lies beyond controversy—my fabulous team at Femina. The team that keeps you as their priority day in, day out.

Love from all of us...

Tanya Chaitanya

@tanyachaitanya

Tanyachaitanya27

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ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER (RMD MAGAZINES) Suparna Sheth, suparna.sheth@timesgroup.com
SUBSCRIPTIONS CENTRES: NORTH 011 39898090, EAST 033 39898090, WEST 022 39898090,
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(For editorial queries, email femina@wwm.co.in)



ON THE COVER

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VALLELONGA (INEGA MODEL MANAGEMENT),
DEPUTY FASHION EDITOR: DIVYAK D'SOUZA;
SEQUINNED SILK GOWN, PRICE ON REQUEST,
MANAV GANGWANI



Anushka Sharma is no longer just that girl-next-door. Moving ahead in her career, she's turned producer. Catch our exclusive video of the making of the cover.

How to make sense of Femina's augmented reality (AR) special

VIEW THE AR FEATURE EMBEDDED IN THIS ISSUE WITH THREE EASY-AS-PIE STEPS

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HEALTH GETAWAY

5 health vacations for your body,
mind and soul

SORRY FOR WHAT?

5 things you should stop feeling
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PARENT'A reader shares her experiences of
raising a child with special needs

DINING ON A DIME

Eating out needn't always burn
a hole in your pocket. Here's
how you can dine out without
spending a fortune

XXL TO MEDIUM

A Femina reader talks about her
struggle, passion, determination
and the fulfilment of a get fit dream

WE'RE LISTENING ONLINE

Our readers react to the meat
ban in Mumbai.**Manpriya Kaur** Instead of
advancing, India is becoming
backward day by day. The day
is not far when there will be
no difference between India
and Afghanistan.**Noorie Hussain** This is
a regressive decision and
makes no sense.**Anjali S** I want to know why have
they banned only meat. Why not
fish? Telling people what not
to eat is certainly not a part of
good governance.**Preeti Roy Choudhury** One
community wants others to give
up meat for four days and the
government is supporting it. Will
it also be equally supportive when
one community asks the others
to eat meat? This is scary!

facebook.com/feminawoman

WE HEAR YOU!

Write to us at femina@wmm.co.in

I really liked the piece in which *Femina* readers voice their opinion on whether or not they would quit if they had a bad boss (All About You, *Vox Pop*) in the September 15, 2015 issue. Four of them said they'd rather quit. The bitter truth is that most of us don't get any kind of support from HR departments or senior management. My boss used to harass me every day and he later made a false allegation to throw me out of the company. Fortunately, my HR team helped me get a transfer to another department. Thank you, *Femina*, for highlighting issues that deserve attention.

Sandra D'souza, Mahim

The September 15, 2015 issue of *Femina* was a refreshing change. Actor Neena Gupta's story on how to be a single parent (All About You, *Celeb Cheat Sheet*) was truly inspiring. The magazine had too many pages dedicated to fashion and beauty. However, there has been a noticeable improvement in these sections. This issue was fresh and stylish. Loved it!

Simran Malhotra, Chandigarh

As a newly married woman, I have been invited for a lot of lunches and dinners. Although I've never applied any makeup, I wanted to make an impression.



I randomly picked up a *Femina* issue and began to flip through the beauty pages. The step-by-step guide to nail the latest trends in hair and makeup (Beauty, *Masterclass*) was a great help!

Seeta Paul, Chennai

The feature on five
30-something women

who took unconventional routes in life (The Big Story) in the September 15, 2015 issue of *Femina* was an exciting read. Reading about the journeys of these bold women made me go back in time. I myself have taken a few tough decisions as far as my personal life is concerned. I ended my marriage despite being jobless and having a one-year-old to take care of. Years passed by and when I was 30, I felt more confident.

Mumukshu Mohanty, via email

I loved the August 14, 2015 issue of *Femina*. Kangana Ranaut looks rather stunning on the cover. The stories on sexting as an art form (All About You, *Passion*), fail-safe sex tips for the second round (All About You, *Passion*) and fights you must have before you walk down the aisle (All About You, *Love*) were very helpful. The story on work-life moves for our 20s, 30s and 40s (All About You, *Career*), made me feel very confident. Thank you, *Femina*!

Pooja Rajkumar, Delhi

WIN!

A TRENDY BAG
FROM ACCESSORIZE

These five winners will receive a handbag from Accessorize worth over ₹3,000. From embroidered weekenders, woven rucksacks, and chic work totes with a minimalist touch to mini handbags that are utterly feminine, Accessorize boasts a plethora of handbags that exude a decadent charm.



queen of lotions,
potions, solutions

damsel-in-distress
-in-denial

social media
butterfly

recovering
bingoholic

For all the women you are
FEMINA

**DON'T EAT. DON'T READ.
DON'T SEE. DON'T CRITICISE.**

Let's un-ban.



BOARD GAMES

Was that film you saw on the big screen last week the way the filmmaker originally crafted it, or did it make it to the theatres only after it was ripped apart by the censor board?

Who decides what makes the cut and what doesn't? Are there any standard guidelines in place that decide the fate of a film? Veteran film journalist **Khalid Mohamed** throws light on these perplexing questions as he chronicles the workings of the Indian censor board

Y
YESTERDAY



Khalid Mohamed is a film critic, filmmaker, theatre director and a Sunday painter. Among the films he has scripted are *Mammo*, *Sardari Begum* and *Zubeidaa*, all directed by Shyam Benegal. He scripted and directed *Fiza*, *Tehzeeb* and *Silsilay*, and has authored the books, *Two Mothers And Other Stories* and *Faction*.

It was one of those intrusive, mid-afternoon siesta phone calls. On a hazy Sunday, a zinc-hard, Hitlerite voice announced, "You will be on the advisory panel of the Film Censor Board."

"Hello there," I purred in my best bedroom voice. "You want me to do what?" And since I didn't know which position to take, I guffawed, "Is this a *Kama Sutra* invite? I do hope it's not kinky."

Unamused, the führer shot-gunned back, "Shatrughan Sinha has recommended your name. Send your biodata to us NOW."

"Huh, okay, but who are you? I don't agree to do anything with anyone."



CONTROVERSIAL INDIAN FILMS



KISSA KURSI KA (1977)

During the Emergency, the original version of this political satire was nixed. Lore has it that its prints were burnt at the behest of Sanjay Gandhi. Later, it was remade with Shabana Azmi in the lead. But the film bombed at the box office at that time.



URF PROFESSOR (2000)

Pankaj Advani's indie film was thumbed down for its 'vulgar scenes' and 'bold language'.



DAZED IN DOON (2010)

Ashvin Kumar's behind-the-scenes look at the famed Doon School didn't make the grade.



INSHALLAH, FOOTBALL (2010)

A boy dreams of playing abroad but his father could be a militant. Ashvin Kumar's docufeature was too flammable, it seems.



GANDU (2010)

This experimental film bristled with dirty talk, scenes of oral sex and more, and was directed by Q. The rap musical went on to garner a cult following online.



THE PINK MIRROR (2013)

Sridhar Rangayan's take on transsexuals was considered unfit by the board.



UNFREEDOM (2015):

Raj Amit Kumar's film on love and sex in the time of terrorism was shot down.

Annoyed, the Hitler-voice stiffened, and rat-a-tatted his address. I noted it down with a ball-point on my feverish palm, and returned to slumber. What a joke, me on the Censor Board!

Hadn't I, as a newspaper Reporter Raju, waged a jihad to expose the weird, weird ways of the Film Censor Board formally known as the Central Board of Film Certification? Hadn't a member of this afore-cited board threatened to file a suit against my newspaper and moi for exposing the hanky-panky behind film censorship?

A dainty conversation over tea and scones with this throbbing member (pun unintended), at her swishy apartment, had resulted in an all-is-swell compromise. She concluded I was a nice guy after all. "You're so courteous," she had trilled when I wah-wah-

ed the scones. And in the tone of a correctional mummyji had advised me, "Don't do it again."

Next, what do you know? I'm being offered a seat on the advisory panel of this Film Certification Whatever. Convenient way, perhaps, to stop a barking dog from barking.

Yet, here was an offer that couldn't be refused, since it would facilitate a dekho at the innards of the Certification Whatever. The censors did their slaughter number from an office that has always fallen short of new brooms that sweep clean. Could I be that broom? Inauspiciously, that turned out to be a case of a deadly delusion of grandeur. I was dropped from the censor office, chaired then by one BP Singhal, in a little over three months. Bloody troublemaker I was, always arguing, putting up a fight for the Ken Russell musical *Lisztomania*. Erm, it had a dance number with a chorus line pirouetting atop a gigantic prop shaped like a penis. Not done. It wasn't cleared. Indian cinegoers *ke liye*, absolutely forbidden. *Tauba tauba.* >

HADN'T I, AS A NEWSPAPER
REPORTER RAJU, WAGED
A JIHAD TO EXPOSE THE WEIRD
WAYS OF THE CENSOR BOARD?



T
TODAY

"Frankly, my dears, I don't give a damn." How I wish I could repeat that Clark Gable punchline. The trouble is that censorship snafus—ban orders, arbitrary revisions, assorted dos and don'ts—haven't gone with the wind at all. On the contrary, bans on international films have multiplied like rabbits.

Vis-à-vis *apna* films, they continue to get into scalding waters. Be it a kiss or a political critique, hackles are still raised. Emraan Hashmi may have turned kissing into an art form; sporadically other actors can pucker up too. Just don't make it too steamy, please, or the liplock footage will have to be reduced.

Politics and violence, though, are considered far more injurious to health. Frequently, then, front-page controversies ensue. And after much hair-splitting, our films are tamed and premiered, depending upon their content, to

full or empty houses. Nowadays, these controversial ones are dutifully chronicled by Google and other online sources as films that succeeded in flapping over the cuckoo's nest. Hit or flop, never you mind.

Come and go a concatenation of governments; without exception, no ruling party's film censorship ideology has been fathomable. Censorship rules (call them 'guidelines' if you wish) are dated and quixotic. Under the current stewardship of filmmaker Pahlaj Nihalani, who patented double-entendre dialogue through risible comedies like the Govinda-Chunky Pandey starrer *Aankhen*, the censor board plays out like a game of roulette. It's all a matter of luck by chance.

An appointee of the BJP government, it has to be conceded that over the decades, Nihalani has been a pleasant-mannered, pukka trade professional. A progressive stance was expected of him. Instead, like with his comedies, the scenario has gone bizarre. A laundry list of expletives and cuss words was declared taboo, I suspect on the heels of Anurag Kashyap's *Dev D* and the *Gangs Of Wasseyapur* films using streetside *gaalis* galore. Protests went up from the filmwallas. Ostensibly, the list has been withdrawn.

BE IT A KISS OR A POLITICAL CRITIQUE, **HACKLES** **ARE STILL** **RAISED.**

Okay, but whatever happened of the minister of Information and Broadcasting assuring a delegation of A-list film personalities that they needn't spend sleepless nights? Reports in the entertainment tabloids crowed that Nihalani's unilateral *farmans* would be overruled. It was even hinted that he might be yanked out of the chair. No go. Nihalani is still there, rocking and reeling. Filmmakers continue to suffer from insomnia.

Consequently, quite a few auteurs have watered down their scripts, some may even jettison projects in the pipeline. The writer of *Delhi Belly*, who was planning to make his debut as a director, I believe, is not sure if he should take the plunge. After all, no punny ditties like *Bhaag DK Bose* translates to no *masti mazaa*. It doesn't wash to cite precedents of the expletives, boudoir encounters and vendetta slug-outs that have already been passed.

I guess inconsistency is the credo. Sure, mistakes have been made in the past, but sorry guys, precedents may be brought up in a court of law but not before the learned ladies and gentlemen sitting there in judgement every day, at the countless screenings across the nation. A token honorarium is paid to the scissor-happy censorship squad towards transport to the screenings. Tea, coffee and biscuits are served, thank you very much. ▶

CONTROVERSIAL BUT SAW THE LIGHT



Shekhar Kapur's
Bandit Queen
(1994)



Anurag Kashyap's
Paanch (2003)
and *Black Friday*
(2004)



Rahul Dholakia's
Parzania (2002)



Nandita Das's
Firaq (2005)



Faisal Saif's
Main Hoon
Part-Time Killer
(2015), earlier
titled
Main Hoon
Rajnikanth



Believe me, the practice has largely been to call in 'lenient' members (oops, I did it again) for a screening if someone under the censor roof wishes it to get through easily. The 'lenient ones' are known to have connections to Bollywood's upper classes. Some of them even happen to be secretaries and chums of the superstars.

At present, the feisty educator and feminist Nandini Sardesai strikes me as one shining role model. If she smells a rat, she doesn't shy away from calling a rodent a rodent. Bully for her, the film censorship monolith does require more of her ilk.

Last year, a top film censorship officer was arrested in a corruption scam conducted via film agents. These agents, well versed in greasing palms, can fix contentious matters, besides expediting clearance certificates at the crimson-taped censor office. Has this state of affairs been sorted—who knows?

Theorists abroad have consistently maintained that censorship is essential to prevent extreme anarchy in cinema.

A line has to be drawn. Correct, no argument about that at all, but it is a responsibility that has to be exercised in sync with the times.

With advancing technology and the cyber revolution, everything from porn to banned films are just a click away, aren't they? Bans, like it or not, have become redundant. So if *Fifty Shades Of Grey* or *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* are banned, no worries. Those who want to see the verboten material can call for a DVD from the rental library and those who don't care about niceties, download them. The forbidden is no longer forbidden.

HOT SEAT

Film personalities who made an impact at the board: all rated

HRISHIKESH MUKHERJEE (1981-82) ****

The most sensible of them all. He resigned in a year, unable to deal with the Kafkaesque system.

BIKRAM SINGH (1983-89) ***

The only film critic to be appointed chairman was incorruptible. He was blamed for retaining Dimple Kapadia's semi-nude shot in *Saagar*.

ASHA PAREKH (1998-91) ***

Often, the yesteryear actor could be gutsy. She supported the clearance of Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, which dealt with homosexuality.

VIJAY ANAND (2001-02) ***

Suggested that triple-X cinemas could screen soft porn films, shocking aunts and uncles on the board. To his credit, he knew more about cinema than most chairpersons.

ANUPAM KHER (2003-04) **

Comme ci comme ça, but after much bickering he did clear some politically volatile documentaries.



In addition, the alternatives are rising. Websites and portals, particularly YouTube, have made any film or lampoon (oh oh, Bakchod style) accessible.

Of late, the Indian market for Hollywood movies has perked up; it is considered a lucrative revenue-generation source. A cordial relationship with the censors is a must. Despite that, at times, arbitrary cuts and oddball strictures from the Indian censors are unacceptable. David Fincher refused to accept the cuts imposed on his tattooed girl. And Woody Allen rejected the mandatory 'Cigarette smoking kills' legend for *Blue Jasmine*.

Ages ago, Stanley Kubrick wouldn't have his *Lolita* tampered with either, and was furious when a scene in his *Barry Lyndon*, showing a boy being caned, was excised. Milos Forman's rock musical *Hair* was banned for being too trippy-hippie druggy. Norman Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar* was dittoed since the censor office received huffy letters from religious groups.

In sum, films from international sources have been 'banned banned'. As for Indian films, they may be subjected to rough treatment, but most of them are eventually cleared. After revisions and appeals reaching

the judicial authorities, they have seen the light of the projector. Take *Messenger Of God* (not an entirely defensible film): that made it to the multiplexes. In fact, there are scores of examples of this, ranging from masterpieces like MS Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* to the upcoming Sunny Leone adult comedy *Mastizaade*, which promises to be as titillating or offensive as *Kya Kool Hain Hum* and the *Grand Masti* series.

T
TOMORROW

So what can be done? Things should be undone actually. Like what? The answer to that, my friends, is blowin' in the wind.

All I can grunt is that the innards of the Central Board of Film Certification are in such a mess that if a zinc-hard voice on a Sunday afternoon were to ask me to forward my biodata today, I would click off my cellphone. And snooze happily ever after. ▶

BY NANDITA DAS



Nandita Das has acted in over 40 films in 10 languages. She has served on several film juries, including twice at Cannes.

Voltaire said, "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." This is how fiercely I feel about freedom of expression.

I am deeply troubled when we allow someone to be 'booked' for liking a certain post on Facebook or when the office of a news channel is broken into because some don't like what they report, or we remain silent at the Censor Board's ludicrous demand of banning the usage of the word 'Bombay' in films. I felt personally violated when MF Husain's paintings were vandalised or the Tamil writer Perumal Murugan's book was banned. When Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and MM Kalburgi were murdered in cold blood for defending free speech and rational thinking, I was extremely anguished and felt personally vulnerable.

I have had my share of attacks over time: during the release of *Fire*, shooting of *Water* and the marketing of *Firaaq*. These were by the self-proclaimed moral and cultural police that wanted to decide what we must watch and wear, think and express or read and write. If art did not play a subversive role, the conservatives would not be threatened by it. While art alone cannot create a revolution, it has a way of influencing our subconscious and conscious response. I do think that *Fire* tangibly brought more awareness about homosexuality, forcing us to bring it out of the closet. If today we are questioning the archaic Section 377 that criminalises homosexuality, I think *Fire* played its role in helping bring the conversation in the public space. *Firaaq* did not end communal violence, but it questioned prejudice, the notion of the 'other,' the struggle for identity, and became a mirror to what needs to be seen.

Every film that raises pertinent questions has actually opened doors for many more such films. As audiences, if we don't speak up in defence of such films, we stand to lose. We need to remember that any form of censorship is harmful in the long run, even for things that we consider terrible. If we ever use it for things that offend us, we should be aware that one day it will be used for things that we hold dear. Freedom of expression fuels good as well as bad, but we have to take the leap of faith that only the good will survive the test of time. Society can only progress when it fosters

multiple ideas. I want to be educated, not by the same noise, but by different voices so that I can make an informed choice.

The world evolves, thanks to courageous voices that challenge status quo. One such significant voice was of Manto, the maverick prolific writer. Despite being tried six times, he fought relentlessly against authority and orthodoxy. When he said,

"If you cannot bear my stories, it is because we live in unbearable times," or "If a person doesn't like what they see in the mirror, I cannot be held responsible", it was not arrogance, but his resolve to express what he saw, what he felt, without dilution.

Democracy is what we have chosen, and rightly so; then how can we disregard its strongest pillar? Despite severe threats, many fearless writers, artists, journalists and citizens continue to defend our right to freedom of speech, putting their necks on the line. They know, as Martin Luther King, Jr, said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." >

WHILE ART ALONE
CANNOT CREATE
A REVOLUTION,
IT HAS A WAY OF
INFLUENCING OUR
SUBCONSCIOUS.

permanent resident
of the 60s

backyard
environmentalist

nobody's
fool

every little niece's
favorite aunt

For all the women you are
FEMINA



BRING YOUR OWN BAN

One man's meat is another man's poison—who knew this idiom, coined centuries ago in Rome, would ring so true in India today? TV host **Rocky Singh**, who loves his beef, ruminates on the food and drink bans that the country is reeling under and concludes that both he and his vegetarian co-host **Mayur Sharma** essentially want the same thing—the freedom to eat without judgement



Rocky Singh and Mayur Sharma are true Indian food connoisseurs, who, through their show *Highway on my Plate*, have sampled over 7,000 recipes in 2,000 restaurants across the length and breadth of India. They are authorities on food, good taste and everything in between.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY: NDTV GOODTIMES

I

I was sitting at a little bar called WTF in Mumbai (a favourite haunt) when my server casually walked up to the table and along with my drink, put down two *naans* with beef fry (a sort of hearty roll that WTF was justly famous for). “Why two?” I asked. “It’s the last of our beef stock; from tomorrow, the beef ban comes into effect,” he said. I lamented the state of the world as I ate my last WTF roll with tears (figuratively) rolling down

my beef-chewing cheeks. The moment lingers in my memory and sometimes, in a drowsy state, my mouth moves up and down, and I can almost taste that awesome roll again.

Let’s put a few things in perspective here. First: more than 70 per cent of Indians eat meat. The majority is not vegetarian, as is believed. Vegetarianism exists largely in the northern states of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and to some reasonable extent, in Gujarat. It is the influence of high-caste vegetarian Brahmins that caused the myth of a vegetarian India to grow. Let’s break this down further. The hill states, starting from Jammu and Kashmir in the Himalayan region, consist mostly of meat eaters. The seven sister states of the North East are famously crazy about their meats—some of the best pork I’ve ever had in my life was in Nagaland. Not to mention the best hornet grubs, worms, eels and crickets. Let’s move on to the coastal states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal. The populations here have traditionally eaten fish, besides other meats. The poor of India

have always supplemented their diet with meat and the cheapest meat available was beef. No more. I guess the powers-that-be want to encourage the eating of rats, insects and other vermin.

My solution was to immediately ask for a foreign breed of cow to be brought to India for beef, but apparently, as soon as a cow touches down in India, it becomes holy. I also hesitatingly point out that our ‘culture’ also frowns upon alcohol but the powers-that-be would never kill this cash cow. There is billions to be made from alcohol. Yes, even in Gujarat, a ‘dry’ state.

The US tried prohibition and failed; in fact, it has never worked anywhere, and yet we continue this pretence of a ‘dry’ Gujarat. Mayur and I have shot there on numerous occasions and were at the Daman and Diu border, when trucks of alcohol merrily went past us and into ‘dry’ Gujarat. A little asking around will get you any kind of alcohol,

albeit in plastic pouches instead of bottles. As for prohibition in Nagaland and Manipur, all I want to say is ha ha ha ha... too funny, give me a second to wipe my eyes. If alcohol is banned in a state, the law needs to ensure that there is no one consuming it. Else, such a ban promotes complete disrespect for the law, the state and its policies.

Given that the frog population was declining to critical levels, the Kerala Government imposed a ban on the eating of frogs a few years ago. I understand and respect that. Protecting our environment and the meagre numbers of wildlife



*We have an
extensive menu
for you to stare
at, since all of it
is banned.*



we have left is important. But animals that are grown for food? Please, oh please, mind your own business. Live your own lives and stop telling people how to live theirs.

Bans have gained tremendous popularity as a means of creating a stir, and little-known political entities use them to gain national eminence. People are made criminals just for eating the way they have eaten for generations. How hypocritical are we? The *varak*, or gold or silver foil used to decorate traditional Indian *mithais* presented to gods in temples, is made by beating metal with hammers, after placing it on a sheet made

with cows' intestines. It is only recently that a small factory in Delhi has started using commercial nylon plastic to make *varak*. So if you want to ban beef, then ban *varak*, milk, leather goods...and then I will believe your sincerity. As of now, I am convinced that these bans are purely political.

It cripples a restaurant to have an entire kind of meat taken off its menu. Karnataka was supplying quality beef to Maharashtra and Goa; this too has been slowly drying up, with the politico-religious situation changing rapidly. The hardest hit are those who made a livelihood by butchering and exporting beef, and are now left in the lurch.

As for the new meat ban in the Mira-Bhayander area of Mumbai, it is a travesty when a secular nation controls the food habits of people on the basis of their own religion. You ban meat for eight days in a year, the next religious fanatic bans it for 80, and then it is banned forever. Garlic goes next, then it'll be onions; thanks to our diverse religions, and it never ends.

We find ourselves perched atop a fence—on one side is tolerance, growth, education, freedom of speech and expression, and fighting corruption. On the other is intolerance, bigotry, the polarisation of society along the lines of religion and caste, ridiculous rules based on a skewed view of what our culture is, and most dangerously, a merger of politics and religion. Which side of the fence will we fall on as a nation? It's a simple matter of what we ban next. Every time we ban something, a little bit of the soul of our great nation changes forever with it. My advice? Eat lots, live well and laugh much. >

BY CYRUS BROACHA



TV host, author, out-of-work philosopher (or so he says). 'So good-looking' and 'photogenic' are his favourite words.

Listen to me very carefully, oh reader.

I'm only writing this piece because I'm outside the country, and my writings can't be traced to Villa Empora in Southern Montenegro, Carnival Street, Sierra Madre, bang opposite the Bank of America parking lot, and 10 metres from the local YMCA. There is no way the authorities can trace me here. Here, sitting with my pal Lalit Modi who, may I add, may or may not be Lalit Modi, I'm enjoying a Cabernet Sauvignon "SS", (banned in Gujarat and Haryana), while he's eating a Croatian dish, the name of which cannot be pronounced by the Croatians themselves, but involves an octopus, an octopus's baby, a shrimp and an eel sharing the same 16 cm porcelain home. (All the above banned in seven states and two union territories in India, even as we speak—although we are not speaking, because I never wrote this.)

What bothers me is not the banning. Or that limp joke that every stale comedian and their mother uses, ie ban all bans. What bothers me is that the bans are happening too fast and furiously for us to keep score. I spoke to my contact at Google, a guy who, may I add, may or may not work for Google, and he clarified that Google just can't keep up with the bans. Not to mention, the revoking of some bans. And worse of all, the partial revoking of some bans. And worse than this, the partial reinforcement of some same bans that had just a minute ago been partially revoked. It's outrageous! However, since I've turned 44, which may or may not have happened at a party in Montenegro, two weeks ago, I am resigned to enjoying two of the last three pleasures available to me. I speak of eating and drinking. The other pleasure, scratching, they can never ever take away from me. Let me shoot

out an undefeatable challenge to the authorities—scratching stays.

Now let me share with you (off the record, of course) the food and drink bans as I see them. In a few states, you can't drink alcohol at all. Yet, in a few others, you can drink alcohol but only in steel glasses. In others, you can drink alcohol, but only up to 10 pm. There is this one state, which encourages a convention, whereby men can drink, but without women being present. There are unconfirmed bans such as: you may drink, so long as you stand on only one leg. Another unconfirmed one says you can drink as long as you

have been married for over 15 years. Then there are date bans. Drinks prohibited on certain dates, for reasons still cloudy in logic. There are also day bans. Tuesdays and Thursdays seem to bear the brunt of this strategy the most.

As for food? The poor bovine is the most nervous. The cow is banned in Maharashtra and Gujarat, but if she wanders into

another state as cows often do...er, watch out! The water buffalo is not banned. But here, there is a problem—to the layman, and to the male cow, the cow and the water buffalo look exactly the same. The consumption of pigs is even more confusing: in Goa they're banned in one part, and gobbled up in another!

My last words? I'd like to quote a dead American president who said something similar to this, "Ask not what your country can ban for you; ask what you can ban for your country." Wise words. You wanna stay in India? Start your own bans to fit in, and make it a happier, tighter woven, more functional society. >

LET ME SHOOT OUT AN UNDEFEATABLE CHALLENGE TO THE AUTHORITIES— **SCRATCHING STAYS.**

godmother of
abandoned pets

champion
of powerpoint

wizard of odd

many times
bitten,
never shy.



For all the women you are
FEMINA



'BANS PRETEND TO PROTECT WOMEN'

From blocking pornographic websites to heavily censoring adult content in films, the government has exhibited a ham-handed approach to dealing with sex in the public domain. While these decisions are supposed to ensure women's safety, they are more damaging than helpful argues **Paromita Vohra**

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The year 2015 is likely to become famed as the year of bans, in a country that has not exactly been shy of the B-word. Over the years, we have banned books and documentary films, mostly for political reasons. But in the recent past, the bans have grown into a full *baraat* and, like some *baraatis*, have been fixated on the sexual.

An early example of this was the 2009 ban on the web comic about the sexual adventures of the bold and buxom Savita Bhabhi. Since then, sex toys, sexual content in films, kissing in public and, most famously, 857 pornographic websites have had a roll or two in the hay with bans.

The rise of organisations that interpret tradition in monolithic

XXX



terms have certainly furthered the culture of moral policing underlying bans. What is the anatomy of this ban mindset?

Since the Delhi gang-rape of 2012, a multi-layered—and very necessary—discussion has grown around women's sexual safety, mobility and choice. For the first time in decades, the themes of women's lives, women's

rights, patriarchy, objectification, sexual violence and sexual freedom have remained firmly in public discussion and have constantly asked to be addressed and redressed. The response to this has often been to evade the issue of mobility and instead falsely address their supposed safety and dignity. Bans are one way of seeming to address the



Paromita Vohra is an award-winning filmmaker and writer whose cutting-edge work is around themes of feminism, urban life, love, desire and popular culture.

issue, without really touching the roots of the problem, a pushback against women's mobility.

Often, bans, especially around sexual matters, are justified by claiming they will uphold a traditional, moral fabric that will enjoin respect and safety for women. But a close look at most prohibitions on sexual materials, products and services, reveals, that at its heart, is a discomfort with the idea of women as beings who enjoy sex, who have sex out of choice and

who care about sex not simply as a conjugal duty, but in fact, as a matter of personal expression and pleasure.

In essence, we see a discomfort with women's choice and freedom and a desire to control it in the guise of respecting women. Take, for instance, the character of the banned Savita Bhabhi who lost no chance to get it on with a number of people in a number of ways. Some critics felt the comic created the standard, objectified pornographic figure of a sexually insatiable woman playing out male sexual fantasies. Other critics suggested it was the opposite—Savita Bhabhi revelled in sex, initiated and pursued it herself and never did it with anyone she did not choose. Cultural products are not neat parables. They may very well contain contradictory threads. But undoubtedly, a desiring woman, who acts on her desires, placed inside the persona of a homemaker, the apparent symbol of traditional demure duty, was unsettling. One could say it was unsettling in direct proportion to its popularity. The same applies to sex toys. Why would sex toys be banned? They play no role in harming or even objectifying anyone. In fact, it's quite the reverse; what they do is foreground the idea of female sexual pleasure and choice.

The invisibility of female desire in the public space showed up interestingly in the memes and jokes that followed the ban on pornographic sites. One meme featured five bare-chested men, brothers from the all-male household of the film *Satte Pe Satta*, falling upon each other, weeping. Below ran the title: 'IIT boys after hearing porn is

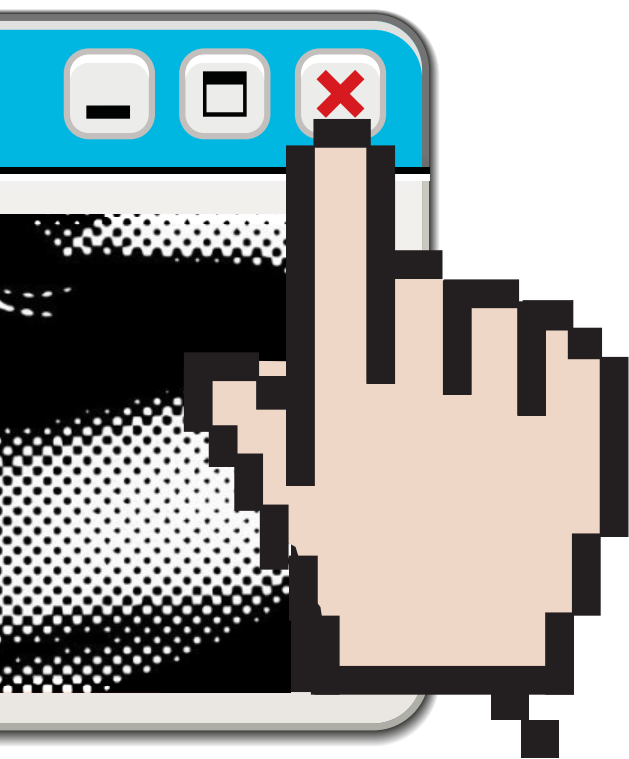
banned.' While extremely funny, like most of the jokes that did the rounds, this one too assumed that the viewers of pornography are men, when in fact, statistics show that 30 per cent of porn users from India are women. Nothing was a greater comment on the fact that we live in a world of men thinking the world is designed around them, their needs, beliefs, practices and humour. And it mostly is.

The discomfort with women's desires comes from and is furthered by ignorance that bans do much to ensure. One example of discomfort and ignorance going hand-in-hand is evident in the censorship of the subtitles of television shows. Here, any words considered offensive are starred out. Some of these are, expectedly, words for sexual body parts and acts. But among the outstanding oddities are: ovaries, uterus, period, rape.

This displays an uneasy ambivalence towards the female body, where her entire reproductive system has to be blanked out for fear of mayhem. This partial acknowledgement of women's bodies doesn't just deepen ignorance. It contributes to women being seen in a fragmented way—as only sexual, rather than as complete, multi-faceted people. If we can't even see someone as a composite body, how will we see them as composite human beings?

Former health minister Dr Harshvardhan's desire to ban sex education in schools—something he is not alone in desiring—only further compounds this.

Eventually, depicting women sans desire goes hand-in-hand with the much-promoted images of women as supportive >



**IF WE CAN'T EVEN
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THEM AS COMPOSITE
HUMAN BEINGS?**



and sacrificing. It fails to create a composite image of female adulthood, one in which women make their own choices—sexual or otherwise—rather than only conform to choices (matrimonial, professional, emotional) that others mandate for them.

Underlining this image perpetuates the idea of women as helpless beings needing protection rather than citizens deserving rights. Bans pretend to protect women from the rampant desires of men. But what they achieve is the reverse—they reinforce the idea of women as passive victims and men as uncontrollable beasts. In promoting this idea, they give it an underhanded justification and permission. Bans are blanket, because they see only stereotypes and simplistic absolutes—they do not recognise diversity, subjective realities and personal agency. The mindset of the ban sees culture

as homogenous. This is also why most relationships that don't fit the heterosexual, married-couple norm meet such resistance, even legally, despite evidence that in real life people have varied kinds of relationships.

Wholesale “solutions” always deepen problems. By labelling everything sexual as a problem, they mask the actual problem areas in the sexual arena, making it difficult to address the real issues. One example of this is the laws around sex work. The primary law dealing with prostitution or sex work in India is the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956 as per which exchanging money for sex is not illegal, but all other commercial activity around sex work—soliciting, brothel keeping, purchasing etc,—is illegal.

The contradiction here is that while it is acknowledged, in

BANS REINFORCE THE IDEA OF WOMEN AS PASSIVE VICTIMS AND MEN AS UNCONTROLLABLE BEASTS.

a way, that one might well choose to charge for sex, in essence these laws make sex work impossible. The category of morality, which is vague, shifting and interpretative, guides the governance on sex work. It is based on the idea that women do not make decisions about their own bodies. Rather, decisions are made for women, by those who sell their bodies. And counter-decisions are made by authorities to protect women.

Sex workers themselves argue against this. They stress the distinction between trafficking—where people are illegally sold into sex work and sex-slavery against their choice—and sex work, a profession women may practise of their own choice. The point is not whether they like the work or not (many engineers, for example, also hate their jobs, and feel exploited by management, but that doesn't make it illegal). The issue is that they choose it. By making all sex work illegal, the law does not prevent it. It simply makes it difficult to practise it securely and fairly, as work. By seeing sex workers only as women, to be sexually guarded and not as workers, it only further oppresses them.

Most bans purporting to protect women from sexual violence, paint the public space as the domain of men, which is dangerous for women, and only push women further back into the home space. Through



this they also mask the most ironic and tragic reality of all. It is reported that 80 per cent of sexual assaults take place either in the home or workspace. This violence is shrouded in utter silence while the loud noise of bans falsifies the truth about sexual power and violence.

By putting sex in the realm of morality rather than choice, bans push sex itself into the closet. By making sex a matter of discomfort, we create a world in which we never truthfully discuss our basic human desires. Sex is discussed as 'trends' and 'numbers' and 'tips' but never as a personal, human experience with its attendant uncertainties and discoveries. Men think discussing sexual experience, except as conquest, makes them less manly; women think if they speak honestly about personal sexual experience they risk being disrespected.

This means that even with consensual sex, people, but more commonly women, are unable to confidently pursue their pleasures—they may rely on what magazines tell them constitutes an ideal sex life, for instance, or on unrealistic pornographic images, rather than find out for themselves what works for them. Many women find it awkward to insist that men use protection, to look out for their own safety because talking about sex doesn't come easy.

Buried in this mindset are feelings of alienation, shame and self-hatred because we do not share our experiences and doubts with respect to sex, because we hear no conversation around sex. No matter how 'cool' we may be on the outside, we feel shame,



BY PUTTING SEX IN THE REALM OF MORALITY RATHER THAN CHOICE, BANS PUSH SEX INTO THE CLOSET.

and unease of discovery within.

With so much self-doubt, how is it possible to act with confidence—in our pleasure, or against violence? Bans disempower people from learning and practising their choices and rights, which makes us less safe, less happy. Reimagining the laws around sex requires a push to re-imagine gender, by which I mean the conception of women but also of men. In tandem, it also requires us to re-imagine sex in positive ways as a deeply personal choice, hence subject to great variety, just like people are. It is only by acknowledging this personal diversity as an idea that we can come to enshrine

it as the cornerstone of public values. People have the right to different moral values. The system needs to engender and enable a respect for this difference; for the possibility of living safely and freely without constraining each other's choices.

Individual choice (if it does not endanger others) does not need to be based on ideas of greater good because unlike lead in instant noodles, it causes no general harm. But the greater good does lie in accepting that in our personal and private space, the most minute of differences has the right to grow and dream as it wishes, filling the world with a textured beauty. ▶

BY RAM GOPAL VARMA



Director, screenwriter and producer. Some of his most acclaimed films include *Rangeela*, *Satya* and *Company*.

D

ear moral crusaders,

The debate that porn could have negative psychological effects on its watchers is the same as the age-old debate about how violence in cinema affects impressionable minds. The truth is that *Sholay*'s Gabbar Singh, one of the most violent onscreen characters in Bollywood, never inspired anyone to become a dacoit. That's because in spite of what you think, people are not such idiots that they do not realise the difference between reality and fantasy.

One of the reasons you want to ban porn is that it might lead to children watching it. I frankly have never understood the panic over children getting exposed to porn. For a child who hasn't yet reached sexual awakening, those images will mean nothing and once that stage is reached, nature itself will induce sexual feelings through a genetically embedded instinct.

Another belief of the banners is that porn will make men pursue harder forms of sex in order to reach higher levels of stimulation. They fear that need for greater stimulation could also make one develop unrealistic expectations from women in real life. This argument holds as much water as the belief that women who watch action films expect their husbands and boyfriends to beat up 20 people in real life.

Sexual pleasure is an incentive given by god so the sexes will copulate, which will result in the continued existence of the species. Sexual bliss is just one of the various pleasures that life has to offer like tasty food, good wine, soothing music, etc. Porn is designed to stimulate our sexual fantasies. Yes, like anything done in excess it's possible that porn might affect some very rare individuals on rare

occasions. But that's like banning traffic because of an occasional accident or banning people from making money because it will encourage robbers.

Adults in our society are embarrassed to talk to their kids about sex. But kids today know about everything from the Internet and they form their own opinions. Let us be honest, look into our past and think about what affected us sexually. Did going through a few adult magazines damage us in any way?

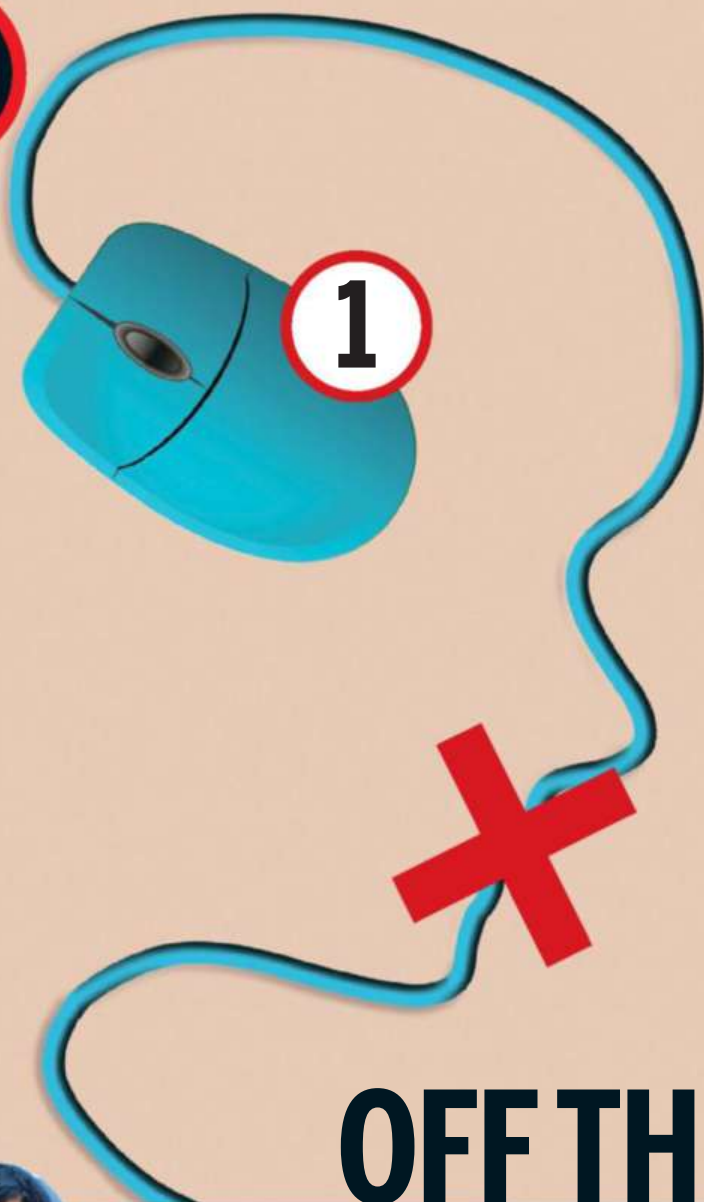
There's no evidence, no professional studies that prove porn affects your brain more than images of violence on television or in movies or video games. Also, it's a proven scientific fact that greater social access to pornography actually decreases sexual crimes. Porn actually provides a safe, quick-fix kind of outlet for sexual frustration. As for its psychological effects, look at it this way: thinking about slapping your boss doesn't increase the chances of you doing it.

**YOU CAN EAT
YOURSELF TO
DEATH, BUT
YOU CAN'T SEX
YOURSELF
TO DEATH.**

Porn is here to stay because millions of people want it; if you want proof, just check the page views on any such video. That's the reason America legalised it decades ago. A truly democratic government will never go against its people's wishes, especially if they're consenting adults.

Countries that have legalised porn are developed because of their respect for individual freedom of choice. We should accept porn as a reality in the same way that sex is a reality. Medically speaking, you can smoke yourself to death, eat yourself to death, drink yourself to death, but you can't sex yourself to death.

Just because it suits your uninformed, regressive minds, you keep attempting to repress others. I would like to quote the Supreme Court of the United States of America in one of its judgements with regard to legalising porn, "If you do not like porn, do not watch it. But you cannot take away the right of the people who want to watch it." >



OFF THE MARK, ONLINE



Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan has been writing since she first learned how, and telling stories from way before that. She is the author of five books: *You Are Here, Cold Feet, Before, And Then After* (short stories) and two books for young adults: *Split* and *The Life & Times Of Layla The Ordinary*. She loves travel, reading and her three cats.

If you're on social media, it's unlikely that you escaped the disturbing image of little Aylan Kurdi washed ashore on a beach in Turkey. What you probably did not come across was an eggplant emoji on Instagram—because the platform's community guidelines don't allow it. **Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan** examines the confusing and inconsistent rules of censorship that govern the online world

T

There are two kinds of social media censorship.

When you sign up for an account with a social media website like Facebook, or Instagram or Twitter, you are confronted with a wall of small text under the heading Terms And Conditions. Most of us are in such a hurry to get to the next step—the fun part—that we just click on 'Accept' and move on. However, these terms and conditions represent a contract we sign with the company, giving them rights over our content in a way that might shock you if you were physically signing this contract with someone else. Facebook's terms give them the right to sell things to you based on your browsing history, for example. Instagram can use any of your photos, royalty- and copyright-free, so while you own your image, you're leasing them to Instagram rent-free. When thought about like that, it should be less surprising that these behemoths also want to make sure you're adhering to what they call 'community guidelines', which is a broad and shifting term that can mean whatever they want it to mean. This is where the first level of censorship kicks in.

When Rupri Kaur first posted her now controversial image on Instagram, she probably wasn't aware that it would get the reaction it did. The Canadian poet and artist had been doing a menstruation series for the social media app, and her latest



post was taken by her sister and showed Rupi lying on her side with her back to the camera. A perfectly ordinary photo until you look a little closer and noticed a smear of blood on her grey track pants, and another on the bedsheet. It was a shocking image because of just one detail: that was the first time I—and a lot of us—had seen menstruation represented in such graphic, everyday detail. Instagram deleted the picture because it didn't follow the social media platform's community guidelines.

This is hardly the first thing Instagram has screened out from its feed. Recently, the hashtag #curvy was banned (and therefore unsearchable) because it violated the guidelines for nudity. Instagram officials put it in the same category as the problematic #thinspo, a hashtag which has faced much questioning because it offers motivation to keep women anorexic. However, as the backlash grew with many plus-sized women

across the world pointing out that #curvy was as different from #thinspo as cheese from chalk—one celebrating a positive body image and the other glorifying a negative one—the app was forced to put it back up.

Instagram also banned the use of the eggplant emoji because it looked too much like a penis. Interestingly, a search for #penis tosses up loads of choices from #penisart to #peniseverywhere to even #penisbreath. Which begs the question: who is this community we're supposedly offending?

Here's a list of things I've seen shared on my social media that no one has chosen to censor:

1. The image of the Syrian toddler washed up on a beach.
2. Images of violence and guns, and stories about gangrape.
3. Images and videos of people torturing stray dogs.

Every morning, I have to choose to cover myself with a protective layer of disconnect, wary of any fresh horror that might break through my walls.

IT WOULD BE DIFFERENT IF CENSORSHIP WORKED IN OUR FAVOUR, **AND TROLLS WERE BANNED.**

What doesn't bother me—I suspect what doesn't bother anyone except a few so disconnected with reality they believe the whole world is the bubble in which they are king—are pictures of breastfeeding mothers, pictures of that one London Marathon runner menstruating all over her shorts and thighs, pictures of naked people (although I'd rather not). None of these things is going to make me want to throw up my breakfast. And isn't breakfast when most of us check our Twitter and Facebook, anyway?

It would be different if most of this was working in our favour—bullies and repeat trolls on social media banned after one thoughtless word too many. But with their knee-jerk reaction to nudity in any way, shape or form, these sites are actually overlooking a whole other layer that plays well within the community guidelines and yet manages to ruin lives. Take Snapchat. The app has seen a huge boom among teens who like that their images and words disappear after a set amount of time. But they use it to sext or bully each other, calling their peers awful names.



After Gamergate, the huge controversy that went down when one journalist pointed out there was sexism in video games, the truth behind online abuse began to come to the forefront. The journalist, Anita Sarkeesian, had systematic online abuse come her way after she posted a campaign to crowd-fund a series of videos called *Tropes Vs Women In Video Games*. The hate grew to include death and bombing threats and one commenter even created a video game called *Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian*. The one good thing that came out of this was that online forums, especially Twitter, began to put guidelines in place to report offenders.

It seems like social media sites are playing it safe. Take author Sreemoyee Piu Kundu, who put up a long post on Facebook about actor Salman Khan's criminal past. The next morning, she woke up to over 6,000 abusive messages, according to a story in *Mint* on cyber bullying. The result? Facebook locked her account, because over 1,000 people had reported the post. Sreemoyee had to approach Facebook and prove to them that she wasn't fake before her account was restored.

Or take Perna Pratham Singh who posted screenshots of obscene messages she received on Facebook, only to find that the website had removed the photos because of its nudity guidelines. The abuser in question had used the word vagina.

Let's now come to the second kind of social media censorship. The kind which is subtly affecting everything you do online. Law student Shreya Singhal was the first to ask for Section 66A of the

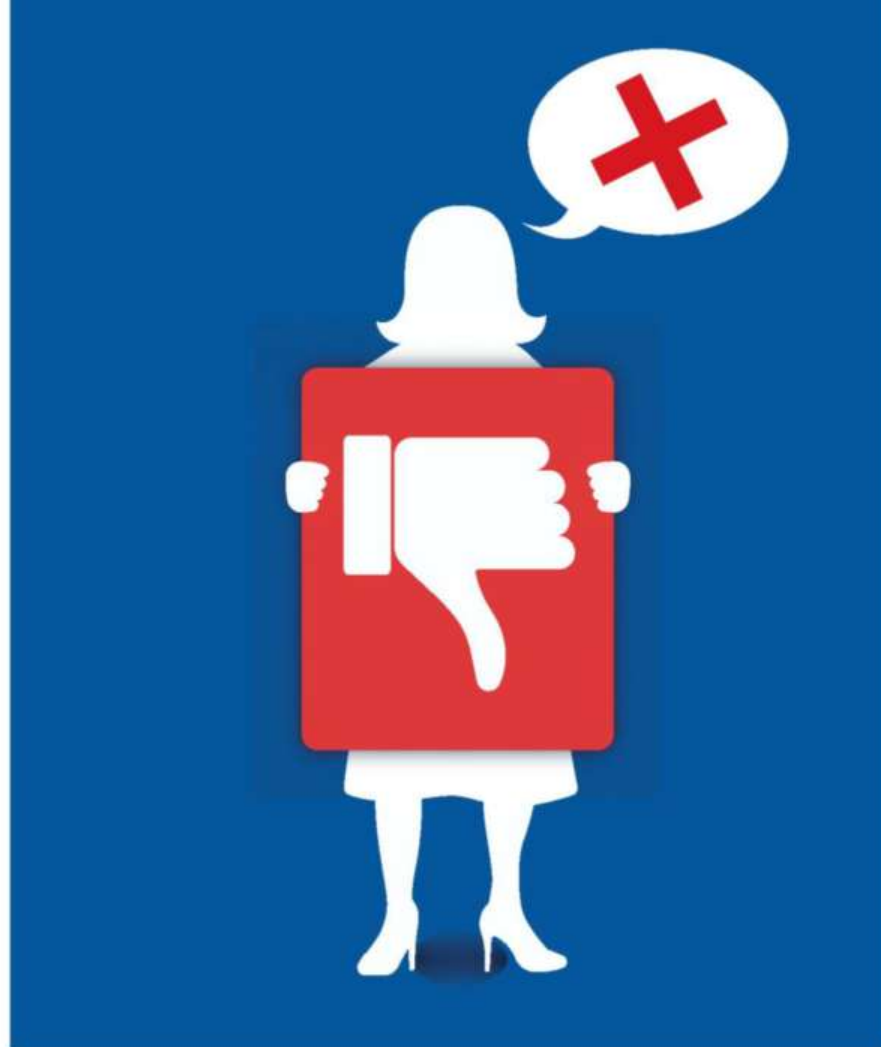
IT act to be repealed. Under it, anything that was said online that could be construed as 'offensive or annoying' could be used to arrest people.

But what does it mean to now have freedom of speech? We're still not in the ideal world that the advocates of this particular freedom want for us. That's when the chilling effect of self-censorship comes in. It's what makes you not mention how you read a study on the rising cause

of rape in India, because anti-feminists will beg, berate and beat you into 'thinking about the men'. You love that happy photo of yourself, but oh your tummy looks big in it, and you can't be sure if people will comment how fat you look, so you keep it to yourself.

The trolls are winning the Internet. My public Facebook page is inundated with messages like "hello", "sexy" and "WHY WON'T YOU REPLY TO ME" and once, penis shots. Female journalist friends who criticise Narendra Modi's policies online are drowned in abuse. For some of us, it isn't worth the effort. It seems safest to post pictures of cats and cupcakes, to not engage with the world at all, to be inward-looking at all times; to draw a veil across our faces as we watch the world burning. ➤

**IT SEEMS SAFEST TO
POST PICTURES OF
CATS AND CUPCAKES,
TO NOT ENGAGE WITH
THE WORLD AT ALL.**



BY SHRUTI SETH



Model and actor, she unwittingly came under fire for her #SelfieWithDaughter tweet.

Dear Trolls,

You and I have always found ourselves on the opposite sides of most conversations. Most recently, we squared off after I expressed my opinion on the Selfie With Daughter campaign.

Or rather, I expressed an opinion and you, in the best tradition of hypocrites everywhere, hastily typed out a barrage of expletives assaulting me and my family, including my infant daughter. Fortunately this, too, passed. I'm assuming there's only so many ways you can insult a woman while taking a selfie with your daughter. All to help promote the cause of women.

It's healthy for any two people to disagree. But why do logical reasoning and debate take a backseat in favour of personal attacks against family and friends? Is your conviction so tenuous that you can't even string together 140 coherent characters to defend it? And when did the world get reduced to a singular point of view: Yours?

**WHEN DID THE
WORLD GET
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POINT OF
VIEW: YOURS?**

Anyway, all I really wanted to say was a big Thank You.

Thanks to your efforts, I found myself at the receiving end of much love and support from people everywhere. Those who didn't know me reached out in solidarity online. Those who spotted me in public walked up to tell me that they were proud of me. So the initial despondency was quickly followed by a restoration of my faith in humanity. Apparently, your tireless campaign to submerge the world in hatred is, how should I put this, spectacularly unsuccessful.

Much to your disappointment, I will continue to express my opinion about LGBT rights, secularism, science, politics and anything else I feel

strongly about. And I'm pretty sure it will be contrary to yours. So see you on the other side of the fence. I will also not be moving to Pakistan.

PS: Thank you for all the publicity you unwittingly got me but I still won't be going to the Big Boss house. Alas!

princess of
all things shoes

3 am pillow-talk
philosopher

secret santa
of office peons

fastest blogger
in the east

For all the women you are
FEMINA



'NOTHING BETTER THAN A BAN TO SPARK CURIOSITY'

From *Rangila Rasul* in pre-independence India to the more recent *One Part Woman*, there is a long list of banned (but not necessarily unread) books in India. Drawing from across decades, **Kiran Manral** notes how mindsets have regressed from being grudgingly permissive to just grudging



Kiran Manral was a journalist before she quit to be a full-time mum. Her novels include *The Reluctant Detective* (2011) and *Once Upon A Crush*. She has two more books due in 2015. She is on the planning board of the Kumaon Literary Festival, is an advisor on the board of Literature Studio, Delhi, and is a mentor with Sheroes.in

T

These are worrying times. We are now a nation quick to take offence, as the recent spate of bans on everything ranging from food and performances to books show. The complexity of the minefield through which a creative person has to make his or her way, in order to avoid the dreaded 'causing offence'

has made it easier perhaps, to withdraw from the creative process, as Tamil writer Perumal Murugan did. Or to withdraw books from the market and pulp them as Penguin did when academician Wendy Doniger's book *The Hindus* raised the hackles of fringe group Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti.

Book bans are not new. In the 1920s, the book *Rangila Rasul* was banned and the publisher of the book imprisoned for five years; he staunchly refused to reveal the identity of the author. The case, in all probability, was what led to the Hate Speech Law Section 295 (A). *Angarey*, a collection of short stories, was banned in 1932 under the Section; an incendiary book

for its times, dealing as it did with sexual hypocrisy. Even Saadat Hasan Manto, much revered today, was considered obscene and put on trial in pre-independence India. You might argue that mindsets were different then and we ought to be much more tolerant and open-minded now, but it seems evident that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

I remember when I first heard about *Nine Hours to Rama*, American writer Stanley Wolpert's fictionalised account of the hours in the life of Nathuram Godse that ended in his assassination of Gandhi. I was in college and failed to get my hands on a copy because it was banned in 1962. In 1964, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*



was suddenly banned in India because of obscene content. In 1988, Salman Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses*, which had the Ayatollah of Iran issue a fatwa against him, forcing him to go into hiding. This was also the ban that brought the word fatwa into the popular lexicon. Interestingly, India was among the first countries to ban the book as a pre-emptive action. Rushdie had to withdraw from an

appearance at the Jaipur Literature Festival in 2012 because of threats from Muslim clerics. Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen's *Lajja*, based on the demolition of the Babri Masjid, was also banned.

A number of books have fallen to the ban police who are strutting around our literary space, muscling in, reading every piece of work with an eye sensitive to the slightest

**WE ARE A NATION THAT
QUIVERS TREMULOUSLY AND
CONSTANTLY ON THE BRINK
OF BEING OFFENDED.**

opportunity to take offence. More recently, the Tamil Nadu government banned two books by writers belonging to scheduled castes on the grounds that the books had portions that would cause enmity, hatred and ill-will, and thereby affect public peace.

T

BOOKS BANNED IN INDIA



**LADY
CHATTERLEY'S
LOVER**
DH Lawrence



**NINE HOURS
TO RAMA**
Stanley Wolpert



**ONE PART
WOMAN**
Perumal
Murugan

There are many, many more like this. Books are banned on every possible grounds, from offending religious sensibilities to slandering public figures to being obscene. We are a nation that quivers tremulously and constantly on the brink of being offended.

When jihadists attacked Charlie Hebdo, India's social media was festooned with the #JeSuisCharlie hashtag for weeks. But when Tamil writer Perumal Murugan was in the eye of a storm for his book *One Part Woman*—which according to those objecting to it, offended the Gounder caste—he didn't find much support from the intellectuals in this country. In despair, Murugan posted on his Facebook page, "Perumal Murugan, the writer ➤



is dead. As he is no God, he is not going to resurrect himself.” He asked his readers to burn the copies and requested his publishers to stop selling his work. There is little or no support for the author who finds himself or herself on the wrong side of a ban in this country.

J

Jaya Bhattacharji Rose, independent international publishing consultant and columnist, says, “Publishers are wary because book publishing is a business and the margins

are low. They can ill-afford to have all their efforts come to nought if they book has to be pulled out of the market, especially when it is at the heart of a controversy and has the potential to sell huge numbers. Book banning cannot be resolved simply. It is inextricably linked to the politics and cultural baggage of the region, especially in that time and place. Otherwise how do you explain Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*? Still a banned book in Germany, can only be issued with permission for consultation on the premises, and is not available in the market, whereas in India, it is freely available (legitimate and pirated versions)?”

How can publishers and authors combat this trigger-happy ban mindset that has plagued us? Does it mean that writing would necessarily have to be published, keeping an eye out for every possible little thing that could cause offence? Or does it mean that the laws need to be made less

draconian, that the space for dialogue and dissent needs to be encouraged, even stimulated, because only with churning, will the best ever rise to the top of the cultural landscape? Or should there be more concerted support for those who dare shake off mindsets and those who dare to offend? Meghna Pant, author of *One And A Half Wife* and *Happy Birthday*, says, “Writing is not supposed to be manageable. It takes

“BOOK BANNING CANNOT BE RESOLVED SIMPLY. IT IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO THE POLITICS AND CULTURAL BAGGAGE OF THE REGION.”

BOOKS BANNED IN INDIA



**THE HINDUS:
AN
ALTERNATIVE
HISTORY**
Wendy Doniger



LAJJA
Taslima Nasrin



**THE SATANIC
VERSES**
Salman Rushdie



you into the unknown. It is transformative. It forces people to think. It is disruptive. It demands a new way of looking at things. It reinvents what we know and reconstructs our world. Censors like to keep things mundane and predictable.”

To quote Oscar Wilde, the books that the world calls immoral how the world its own shame. There is nothing better than a ban to spark curiosity and get people scrambling to read the book. After all, in this day of the internet and easily available PDF downloads, how much relevance would a print-and-paper ban really have? >

WENDY DONIGER



Author of 40 books, including *The Hindus: An Alternative History* that sparked the ire of religious extremists

T

o Indian lawmakers and publishers, I was thrilled to see the powerful responses from the Indian public protesting recent acts of censorship of works of art, particularly, but by no means only, of books. I fervently hope that lawmakers and publishers, emboldened by this popular support, will work together to amend laws such as 295A, under which my own publisher, Penguin India (at the time of the lawsuit, now Penguin Random House), was prosecuted. If the law cannot be abolished—though perhaps someday it can be—I would hope that at the very least it could be immediately changed to make it merely a civil, and not a criminal offense, so that anyone convicted under it would pay a fine but not serve time in prison. I fear that as long as it remains a criminal offense to ‘deliberately intend to wound the religious feelings of any person’—a charge so broad and vague that it is hard to imagine anyone writing a serious book about religion who would *not* be in danger of being accused of it—publishers will quite reasonably be wary of taking on books of a controversial nature.

This is already happening widely in India, as publishers, and writers too, self-censor rather than wade into the shark-ridden waters of a new India in which any self-appointed religious moral

police can bring criminal charges against a writer. And so, in addition to the books that we see actually being attacked (by individuals as well as by the government), we must be concerned for the many books that we do

not see, books that have failed to find a publisher brave enough to put his freedom, and sometimes his safety, on the line for them.

Indians have always, rightly, prided themselves on their intellectual open-mindedness; the rich variety of views often grouped under ‘Hinduism’ testifies to that exemplary inclusiveness. But that great-hearted tradition was devalued

under colonial rule, which saw the rise of repressive factions within Hinduism that ultimately gave rise to Hindutva. And now those factions have begun to undermine the intellectual freedom that has always been one of the joys of Indian culture. Far from facilitating irresponsible, sanctimonious, self-serving attacks by religious factions upon individual writers and artists, the law should protect them from such litigation. I hope and trust that Indian lawmakers and publishers—yes, and writers and artists, too—will band together to make this happen. ➤

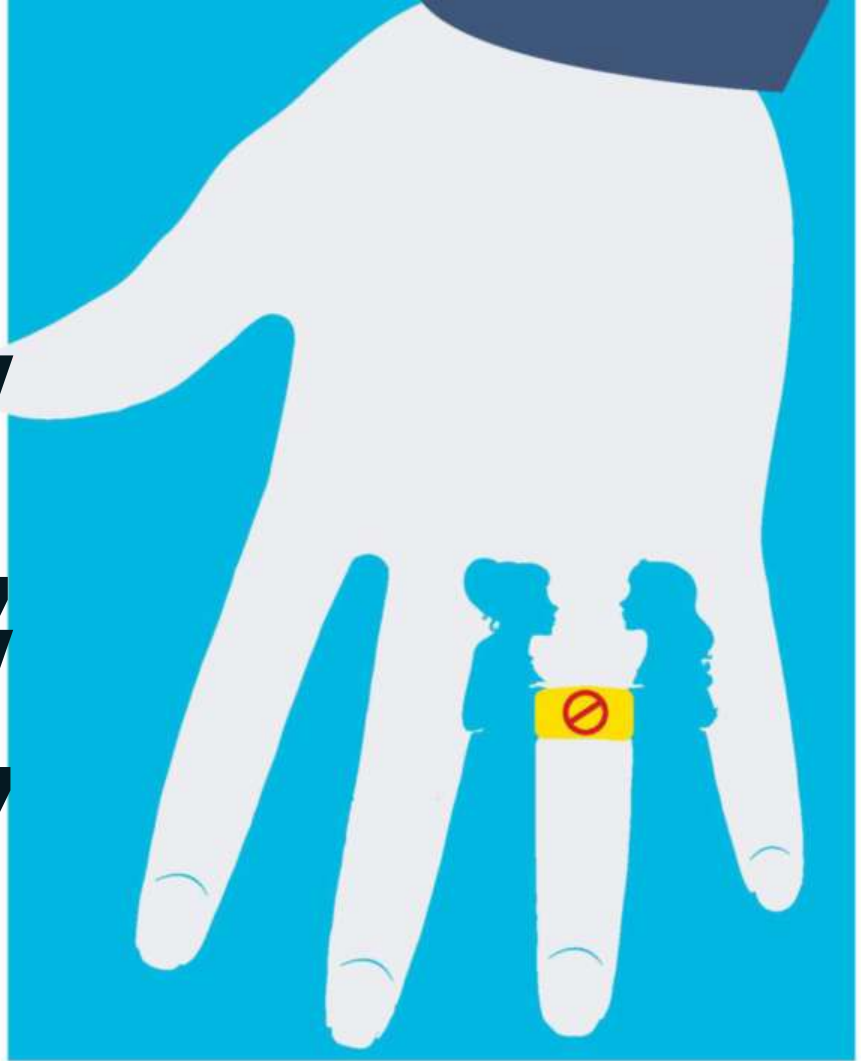
**WE MUST BE
CONCERNED FOR
THE BOOKS THAT
HAVE FAILED TO
FIND A BRAVE
PUBLISHER.**



'IT'S GAY PRIDE, NOT GAY SHAME'

First the courts decided to overturn an archaic law, then they overturned the overturning, basic human rights be damned.

Vasu Primlani points out the irony behind this unconstitutional colonial era law and explains why Section 377 doesn't even serve its purpose



Oh, it is hilarious being gay in India. As in, it's a bad joke.

What does India think about homosexuality? It is schizophrenic, I'd say. In 1860, India was told homosexuality was illegal. In 2009, we changed our minds and said, no, it is okay. In 2013, we demurred for a successful 360-degree: on second thought, homosexuality is weird, but either way, we don't want to deal with it. Eunuchs are recognised, gays aren't.



Vasu Primlani
is India's first gay professional comedian.
She teaches business school, is
a triathlete, and a somatic therapist.

The law that criminalises homosexual behaviour was drafted by Lord Macaulay in colonial 1860 and states that 'whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment'.

But here's the thing. Homosexuality isn't against the law of nature, homophobia is! Homosexuality is found in over 450 species—homophobia in only one.

This schism also divides the country in terms of its religious heads. I've been on panels where all religious heads have finally agreed on one thing: that homosexuality is a bad habit. The *maulana* said I should be stoned to death under Sharia law; the Catholic priest said we don't discriminate, but it is not natural either; and the aunty who is a follower of Baba Ramdev promised she could cure me within six months. On the other hand, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar tweeted that ➤



'Hinduism has never considered homosexuality a crime' and 'To brand a person a criminal based on sexual preferences would be absurd'.

The corporate world is at odds with what the government says. While the Indian government criminalised homosexuality, the corporate world took the opposite stance. *Forbes* magazine reported that the HR departments of 11 top multinationals—including Goldman Sachs, The Royal Bank of Scotland, Cisco,

Dell, Novell, General Electric and Microsoft—came together at IBM's Bangalore campus to share best practices for fostering a culture of LGBT inclusion in their organisations.

Even the government is at odds with what the government says. Former minister Oscar Fernandes backed calls for the decriminalisation of consensual gay sex, and the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called for greater tolerance towards homosexuals. The law that criminalises homosexuality is unconstitutional, as it contradicts the right to life, personal liberty and equality.



While there have been few prosecutions during the past 20 years, campaigners have long complained that the law has been used to harass and blackmail gay men. They believe the 377 decision will leave up to 7.5 crore Indians open to harassment.

Regarding the decision of the SCOTUS (Supreme Court of the United States) to legalise gay marriage, Chief Justice John Roberts wisely noted that it had "nothing to do with the Constitution." Constitutional meddling ends outside the bedroom, respecting people's rights to choose who they love.

My choice to love a woman, or a man's choice to love a man, has often been compared to rape. They say, allow the rapists to go free too. In India, where marital rape is not considered rape, I can see how people can get confused. That which is, isn't, therefore what isn't, must be. Confusing? I think so too.

Gays are special all right, just not in the perverted, sick-in-the-head kind of way that Indian legislature or social mores make them out to be. A list of LGBT people across the world reads like the who's who of super-achievers, people who have made all of humanity proud, let alone their nations: James Baldwin, Ellen DeGeneres, Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil, Rock Hudson, Sir Elton John, Frida Kahlo, Martina Navratilova, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Walt Whitman...

CAMPAIGNERS BELIEVE THE 377 DECISION WILL LEAVE **UP TO 7.5 CRORE INDIANS OPEN TO HARASSMENT.**





It is gay pride, not gay shame, for a reason.

People of the LGBT community practise love. Make no mistake, they have the same dysfunctional relationships straight people do. The best you can do is be their friend, let them be your shoulder in times of distress. At worst, do no harm.

Just like vegetarianism doesn't define a person, homosexuality doesn't either.

Someone somewhere must have drawn the distinction between disagreeing with something, and banning, with the fine *lakshman rekha* of democracy. They must've said, you might not agree with homosexuality, but you can't ban it. Just like you might not like to eat meat, but you can't ban it. (And somewhere in Mumbai, some legislator went, 'Hey!' and that led to the meat ban, and a second face-palm moment.)

Today, India's LGBT community lives in fear of prosecution. They

INDIA SEEMS DEEPLY MIRED IN PREJUDICE. GAYS ARE THE NEW UNTOUCHABLES.

live invisible lives. If you say gay, they hear sex, followed by an immediate visualisation of all sorts of positions that people gross themselves out with. But here's the thing: It's not your business. Gay people can find straight sex just as gross. They don't come up to your door and make puke-y faces. Perhaps, we need to change the term from homosexuality to homo-love-ability just to shift the focus.

When a minority is prosecuted by a culture, a country's law and leadership are ethically required to step in to protect them. Gandhi did it. Ambedkar did it. The repealing of section 377 demonstrated

a temporal schism dragging India back into the dark ages. It is as if India were saying to its LGBT community: your rainbow colours are too bright; you deserve to be in prison stripes of black and white.

It is just that when we wonder why India, despite its intelligentsia, great riches and innovations, etc, is not considered developed yet, this is why. LGBT rights fit squarely under human rights. India's official position puts it in the same bracket as Nigeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen and Cameroon. This is far removed from the table of global superpowers India aspires to sit at.

India has had a long march toward human rights yet seems deeply mired in prejudice. The widows were untouchables. Untouchables were untouchables. Divorced women were untouchables. Eunuchs were untouchables. Women are chattel, and to be overly touched. Gays are the new untouchables. And I won't even speak about people with special needs here.

Then there is a health argument against Section 377 too—Jeffrey O'Malley, director of the United Nations Development Programme on HIV/AIDS, has observed that countries that protect gay men have more comprehensive and effective HIV prevention services. Inappropriate criminalisation hinders universal access to essential HIV, health and social services.

Lastly, if you want to prevent gay sex, 377 doesn't really help. The finest argument I've heard against the granting of gay rights is: if you want to prevent gay people from having sex, you should let them get married. Section 377 is unconstitutional, unethical, sets India back by centuries, creates bad publicity for us in the global market, and doesn't even serve its purpose. Throw it where it belongs: in the colonial dustbin. ▶

BY WENDELL RODRICKS



Wendell Rodricks is one of India's most renowned fashion designers.

D

ear Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ministers, MPs, MLAs, all in government services, and judges in the Supreme and High Courts of India,

I am bringing up a topic that may make you groan collectively. But the fact is, the endlessly pending matter of amending Section 377 must be addressed. And it is fitting that it should be addressed in the largest Indian women's magazine, as everyone has recently been speaking about women's rights and safety in our country. Let me explain the connection.

For many years now, there have been excessive debates over Section 377. The fact that it is rarely used, except in the extortion and persecution of a minority community, is accepted. What the public at large does not understand is that this section applies to every Indian male, female and transgender. We are trapped because of a draconian Victorian law where any sex 'against the law of nature' is criminal.

I am glad that the Prime Minister has travelled far and wide in the last year. I am sure that these travels have resulted in the acceptance that Section 377 must be changed. It's a view seconded by many eminent judges and lawyers in India.

We are not asking to scrap the section from the constitution. Everyone is simply asking to amend it such that consensual sex in

private is not a crime. What is wrong with the present Section 377 is that it allows the government, police and legal system to enter a very private space—our bedrooms. Do we really want that? I do not want to know what goes on in your bedrooms, dear PM, members of parliament, MLAs, judges, lawyers, and sundry government officers. The very thought of prying in this voyeuristic manner is deplorable and vulgar to me. So why are you putting your own bedrooms at stake? With this one amendment, you can halt anyone from going where we don't want to go: your collective bedrooms.

Why are you all not amending this section so that India comes out looking progressive in the eyes of the world? Imagine the congratulatory messages that will come pouring in from world leaders like Barack Obama, Angela Merkel, François Hollande, the leaders of UK, Europe, and even Israel. (All nations, by the way, who have stopped the law from entering their citizens' bedrooms.)

An amendment of this Article will be a PR coup for India in a world

sorely in need of good news.

Like many initiatives such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and women's safety, please give a thought to amending Section 377. Let us keep consensual sex in the private domain, without resorting to protests from outdated moralists, religious bodies and narrow-minded people who have no vision for a progressive India.

Jai Hind! ▶

**THIS SECTION
APPLIES TO EVERY
INDIAN MALE,
FEMALE AND
TRANSGENDER.**



It's ironic that in a country that boasts of the Khajuraho temples and the Kama Sutra, artists like MF Husain have come under attack for their depiction of sex and sexuality. Prominent curator **Alka Pande** takes a closer look at what ails artistic freedom in India

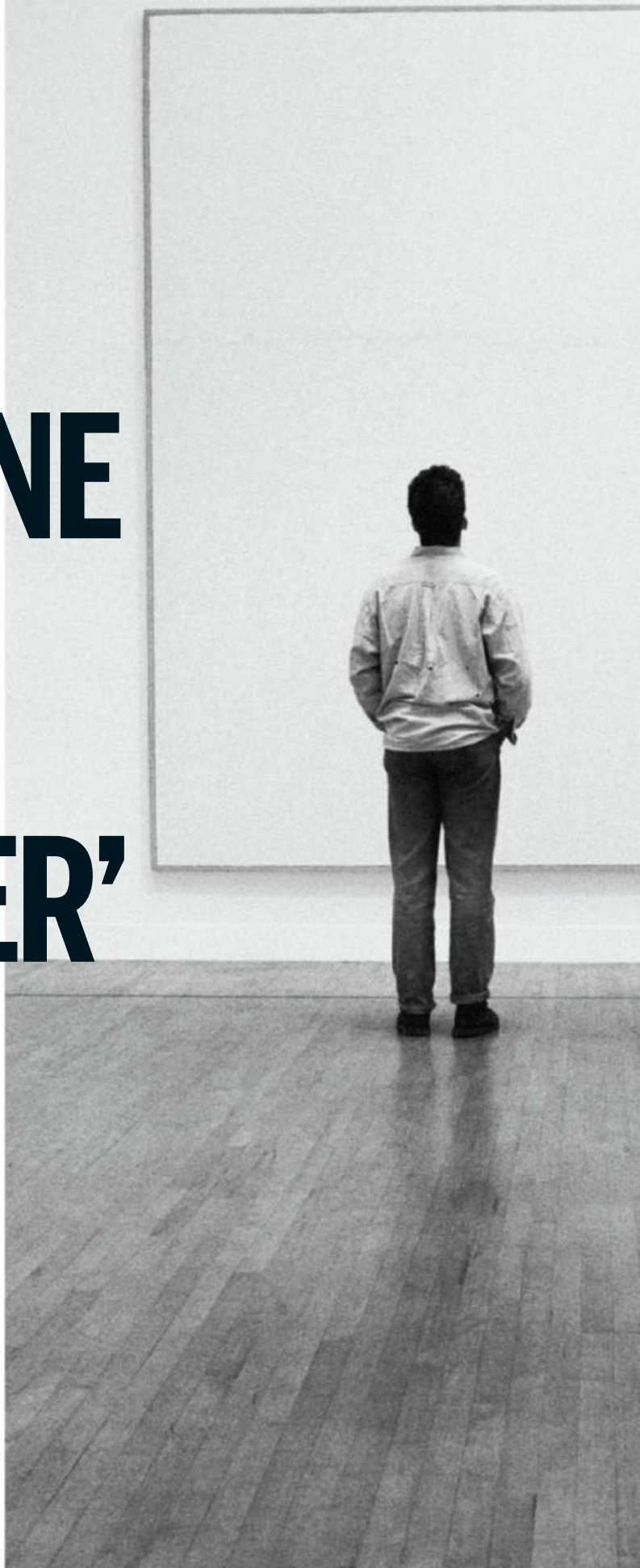
'OBSCENE TO ONE, ART TO ANOTHER'




Alka Pande is a prolific writer on Indology and art history, with special interest in Ancient Indian Erotic Literature and Art. She is currently a consultant arts advisor and curator of the Visual Arts Gallery at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi and a visiting faculty of Arts and Aesthetics at the DJ Academy of Design, Coimbatore.

B

"Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder and so does obscenity," observed Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul in 2008 when he quashed the criminal charges against artist MF Husain for hurting religious sentiments with his depiction





“THEY SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES, WHAT IS THE HUMAN FORM? **DO THEY KNOW WHAT NAKED IS?”**

of Mother India and goddess Saraswati in the nude. However, that was not the viewpoint of the right wing fundamentalist groups who targeted Husain's works in 1996, defaced his house in 1998, threatened his family, filed hundreds of cases and repeatedly issued death threats to him.

This was not only unjust but also bizarre, given that these seminal works, like his masterpiece *Bharat Mata*, which was a coming together of the many facets of the term (woman, mother and India), had been created in the '70s and '80s. Sadly, Husain was forced to leave his country of origin in 2006 and died in London five years later, leaving India the poorer for one of her greatest modern painters.

When I spoke to his eldest son, Shamshad Husain, a well-known artist himself, he said, “Who are these people to take action? They should ask themselves first, what is the human form? Do they know what naked is? They raised the issue about my father's works because he was Muslim. I don't think art should be censored. Everybody has the full right to visualise and create what they want. Every human being is born naked and every human being leaves the earth naked.”

Obscenity is a serious issue in the arts, and the draconian

censorship law, Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code, is increasingly brought to bear against artists, filmmakers, photographers and writers for hurting religious sentiments and for obscenity.

Under the law, a work is deemed obscene only if it is lascivious, appealing to prurient interest, and might deprave or corrupt people who might read or view the work.

Wendy Doniger, whose book *The Hindus: An Alternative History* was pulped in 2014 after objections were raised that it supposedly denigrated Hinduism, has strong opinions about the law. “This law is dangerous in part because of its subjectivity: it depends upon the mind of the person viewing the art, something ultimately impossible to determine, let alone control. Therefore anything—even a blank piece of paper—might ‘appeal to the prurient interest’ of some viewer. If it is to be kept at all, the law should be changed to describe the actual content of the offending art rather than the hypothetical state of the viewer's mind. But is such a law to be kept at all? Even as it stands, it makes exceptions for religious art, presumably granting that such art might in fact ‘appeal to the prurient interest,’ though it might then be prosecuted under Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code, an equally subjective law, which imagines the ‘offence’ in the mind of the viewer or reader even as Section 292 of the IPC imagines the viewer's prurience. This whole corpus of legislation poses a serious danger to Indian art and culture.”

Doniger has astutely hit at the heart of the matter; Section 292 is vague, containing, as even the Justice Kaul judgment points out, no definition of obscenity. Its most fascinating feature, however, is that it makes exceptions for pamphlets, books, ▶



papers, paintings, drawings or representations of figures that have been created in the interest of science, literature, learning or art.

Artist Viren Tanwar, whose paintings of nude figures and animals in supposedly objectionable acts was slapped with a complaint of obscenity in 2007, argues, “What is obscenity? Who defines, explains and finally legalises it and on what grounds? What is obscene to one may be art to another. This leaves India’s anti-obscenity law very subjective. On what ground does the Court hold sexual arousal to be something that ought to be criminalised? What may arouse one may not arouse another, so where do you draw the line?”

In 2007, artist Chandramohan Srilamantula, a scholarship recipient and art student at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, found himself caught in the crossfire when VHP activists targeted his exhibition of works depicting numerous gods, claiming that it hurt religious sentiments. “Thousands of years ago, there were many erotic paintings and sculptures across India,” he says. “Today we wouldn’t be able to build a Khajuraho temple in our country. Organised religious groups and goons are suppressing such art, artists and viewers’ freedom for their own ends. I disagree with the current anti-obscenity law. Such laws and the political climate may hamper the physical (artists and their work) but not their creativity.”

Photographer Vickram Singh Bawa, whose photo of two naked men kissing at a 2002 exhibition in Mumbai’s Jehangir Art Gallery had to be pulled down after protests, says, “Who is the

competent authority on art and cultural freedom? Has someone well versed with the arts designed this law? I think not.”

Akash Das, a photographer acclaimed for his work in fashion and advertising, was asked to take down his work *Asian Nudes In The Urban Jungle* in 2008 at the India Habitat Centre. “A bunch of self-proclaimed guardians of morality can only sharpen the intellectual divide between progressive and regressive India by indulging in violence. More often than not, their acts are pre-planned and their violence is unleashed without bothering to understand the artists’ point of view.”

The Japanese gave the world Shunga prints, famed for their vast and varied depiction of sexuality, while the Chinese, Greek, Romans and Peruvians have an extensive history with erotica in both text and image. However, no work the world over has come as close



“TODAY WE WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO BUILD A KHAJURAHO TEMPLE IN THIS COUNTRY”

as the *Kama Sutra* in depicting sexuality as part of a rich and fulfilled life, equating sex with spirituality. Known the world over as an ancient sex manual, the work is actually a deeply philosophical treatise on how to live a full life and mediates upon love in its many forms—from the familial to the erotic.

Much of my own work has seen me delve into erotic texts and art. In 2012, I embarked on a journey of the aesthetics of the erotic, in which Michel Sabatier, a French collector, and I collaborated with Marc Resetellini, the owner of one of the largest museums in France, to do an iconic show on the *Kama Sutra*. *The Spiritual And The Erotic In Indian Art* opened to a hugely appreciative audience in Paris. It was ironic that while in Paris there were huge posters of the exhibition at every metro station, there was no chance of hosting the exhibition in India, for the fear of the Act prohibiting obscenity. So the exhibition could not be hosted in the land where the text originated.

The sacred and the sexual have coexisted in the collective consciousness of Indian culture. Literature, from the *Kama Sutra* to the recent works of author Perumal Murugan, who came under fire, has had an unbroken tradition of depicting human sexuality. So it’s disconcerting to have such polarised views on the freedom of artistic expression in the context of modernity and contemporary thought. >

TASNEEM ZAKARIA MEHTA



Art historian, writer, curator and cultural activist, she is also the managing trustee and honorary director of Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai. Her views are personal.

D

ear Minister for Culture,

I would like to share some thoughts with you on the censorship of art and culture; in particular, I would like to address the regressive views held by some regarding nudity in art. The power of art lies in its economy and instant impact. What takes a thousand words, takes a minute to communicate through the image. Unfortunately, the message, when it concerns depiction of the female body, is often compromised or misinterpreted. The enormous edifice of social dignity that society has constructed to protect it from perceived nebulous threats occasionally distorts the deeper meaning. It was many summers ago that I first reflected on why artists employ the beauty or the decay of the human body as metaphors to depict more profound ideas. At the time, my family and I were visiting the Ellora Caves. My father, who was in the government, was told by officials that there were certain caves the children, including myself who was 14 at the time, should not visit. After a while, my parents were whisked off for formalities and the children, who were consumed by curiosity to find out what we should not be viewing, set about to discover the tantalising secret.

It was Lord Shiva in close embrace with Parvati. The sculptures are masterpieces of the 8th century, when nudity did not evoke the same prejudice it does now. The sculptures are a celebration of the creative impulse of life and the perfection of the human form, manifested in the deities. If children are taught to appreciate the beauty of such works of art and not see them as sexual images, our reading of such depiction in art would always carry the respect and awe it deserves.

However, the human mind's capacity to distort is possibly as infinite as its capacity to create. For example, European explorers

who travelled to India during previous centuries, viewed these extraordinary temple sculptures as grotesque because they did not conform to European standards of realistic depiction. Indian sculpture was reviled as primitive, unsophisticated and demonesque. Today, in the light of a new world order, India's art—her temple sculptures, in particular—is celebrated and appreciated across the world.

Every society inherits and constructs standards that enable it to define values. However, often elites and governments control cultural display and dissemination as a way of controlling the narrative of history and the minds of its populace, subtly influencing the decisions of the majority. By insisting, for instance, that nudity in art denigrates women, governments attempt to circumscribe the role of women and valorise norms of behaviour like obedience and submission.

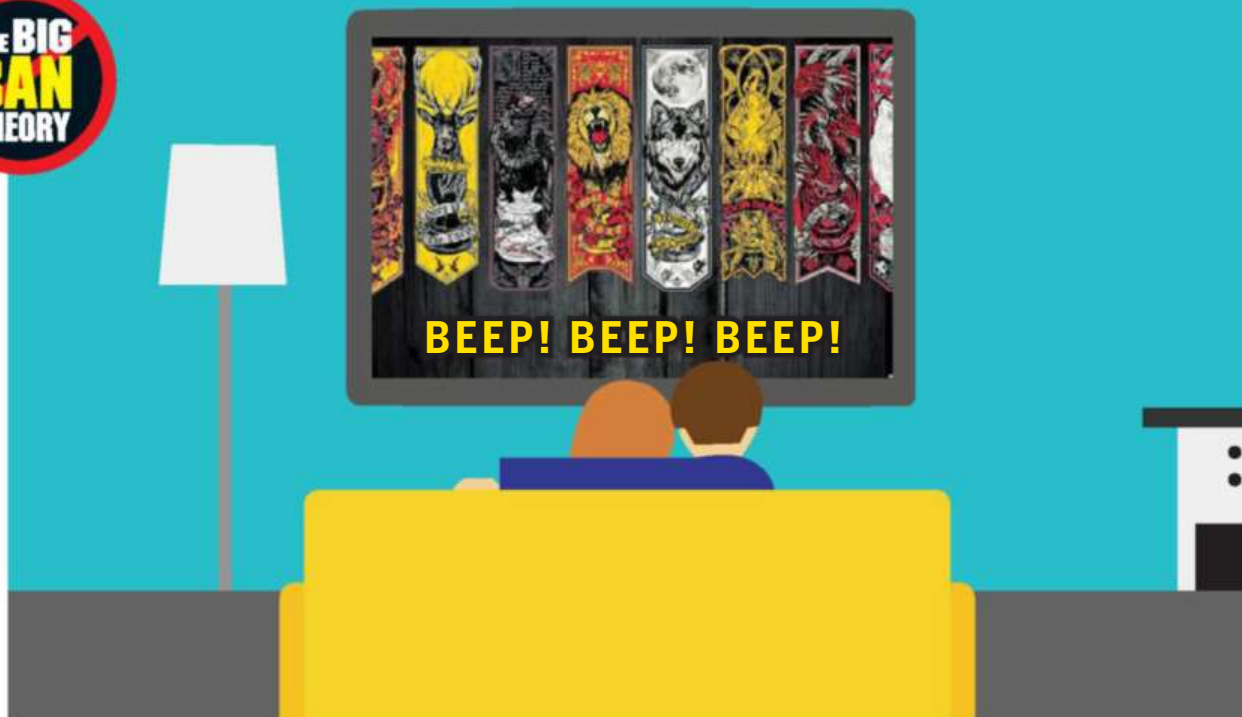
In our society where female foeticide and rape are scourges we urgently need to eradicate, insisting that the female body should be shrouded encourages

behavioural attitudes that seek to control it, and through that, the female mind, perpetuating age-old hierarchies of power and dominance. Instead, what needs to be encouraged is the ability to view the nude female body with respect and to try to understand what the artist is trying to communicate.

It is important to grasp that if we are to develop an

intellectually lively and curious society, we need to encourage a variety of views. We must allow artists of all hues the freedom to express ideas in the manner they consider most appropriate, even though sometimes these may not conform to the views that the majority espouse. By encouraging discourse and debate, we enable people to understand the perspective of the other, which is essential for the development of a healthy and harmonious community. The ancients got it and that is why India was such an intellectually and spiritually advanced society then. Somehow we have lost our way and need to reorient ourselves. >

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OF THE OTHER.



BEEP GOES THE CENSOR

When it comes to television programming in India, context can go to inferno. **Anu Menon** documents the hilarious results of censorship on Indian television

I

*Isn't it ironic...don't you think?
That banning a ban would still involve
banning something?*

(Alanis Morissette would have added those lyrics to her song if she were Indian!)

I started my career on television. I played a character called Lolakutty who interviewed Bollywood stars on Channel V. I honestly believe that if I had come up with the idea of Lola today—a politically incorrect, bespectacled, accented Keralite spinster, TV would have laughed in my face and sent me to YouTube. Everyone is running scared and no one wants to take a risk anymore for fear of

being censored or banned or both. Taking offence has become our favourite pastime; it may seem, in fact, that it has turned into a national necessity. But I'm still alive. The Malayali Mandal has not put a *supari* on my head. Yet.

They say that television is soon going to become a redundant medium because there is just too much censorship—senseless replacement of words, curtailed freedom of speech, scenes vital to plot and characters chopped. Move over Monopoly and Scrabble, there's a new game in town: Let's Guess The Word Beeped Out By TV Channels.

It's not words that need to be penalised, we need to comprehend the context. And that requires exercising sense and sensibility. You don't replace 'Hell to the no' with 'Inferno to the no' and 'Yeah bitch' with 'Yeah harlot'. Unless it's a faceoff between a thesaurus and Shashi Tharoor.

You can't supplant 'I don't give a shit' with 'I don't give a jerk!' Or 'I'm horny' with 'I'm in passion'. Also, if the character is not allowed to say the word cocaine maybe the subtitles shouldn't give it away, either.

But my personal favourite



Anu Menon is the artist formerly known as Lolakutty. Her holy trinity is Theatre, Talk and Tea. PS: Taikwando some day.

is beeping out the word beef. I am a Hindu and I don't eat beef. But that doesn't mean I expect the contestants of Masterchef Australia—or anyone else for that matter—to not eat it. How am I supposed to watch a cooking show where they are making steak, but not know the ingredients?

Every channel has a standards and practices department, which is responsible for regulating the content. But give the viewer some credit—we know that two consenting adults want to have sex, not 'gender'. And for some inexplicable reason, panties are changed to 'short pants' but thongs are inoffensive and manage to pass muster. All these curbs are not making us less lascivious as a people. Crimes against women haven't gone down because they replaced breastfeeding with 'chest' feeding.

In November 2014, the Delhi High Court upheld the Centre's decision to stop transmission of entertainment channel Comedy Central for 10 days for airing shows having "obscene" and "vulgar" dialogues, besides being derogatory to women. They did not support shows that had the potential to "deprave, corrupt and injure the public morality and morals". If people were so influenced by what they saw, those anti-smoking ads would be enough to put them off tobacco for life.

We seem to operate on an archaic notion: English language=the West=bad influence. The sexual innuendo and double-entendres on Hindi channels far outweigh their occidental counterpart. Even the French would blush. I find our obsession with men dressing up as women on prime time comedy shows appalling. I find

the crassness that passes off as 'desi' humour galling.

Historically, governments have enforced censorship to thwart things that are considered offensive, immoral and harmful to society. I understand that there is a need for censorship. But let's be sensible. It's better to have a fool-proof method in place rather than an over-critical, over-cautious, over-zealous system. There are parental locks on channels. Programming with adult content is beamed late at night when the kids are safely tucked into bed, dreaming of unicorns and rainbows. Until, of course, they turn on the internet.

BY SURESH MENON
Actor and stand-up comedian



To those easily offended,

In the current scenario where censorship lurks around every corner, humour has been hit hard. Sometimes, I feel that because social media critics have increased, one man's joke has become another man's poison. But this isn't new. Even Birbal was banned from Akbar's court for using humour. Modern Birbals find themselves in a tricky situation—either they put up hard-hitting comedy shows that are loved by millions but run the risk of being reported, or they stick to Doctor/Waiter jokes that may be liked by a few hundred people. On a good day. Personally, I have seriously been thinking of taking comedy to the next level—to the flat above my flat where no one gives a flying saucer about what I have to say because no one stays there.

Watching TV is confusing—cuss words are not allowed, but switch on a cartoon channel and you hear some characters imitating Shakti Kapoor. Try to watch English movies and so many words are beeped out that you feel you are watching a version of Little Bo Beep. I think I've figured out the best way to watch TV—on mute. ➤

VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE ARTICLE ARE OF THE AUTHORS/SUBJECTS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF THE EDITORS OR PUBLISHERS. WHILE THE EDITORS DO THEIR UTMOST TO VERIFY INFORMATION PUBLISHED, THEY DO NOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS ABSOLUTE ACCURACY. IN MATTERS WHICH MAY BE SUB JUDICE, FEMINA TAKES NO LEGAL STAND.



WE SEEM TO OPERATE ON AN ARCHAIC NOTION: **ENGLISH LANGUAGE=THE WEST=BAD INFLUENCE.**



NOTHING OFFICIAL ABOUT IT

They aren't issued by any legal body, yet arbitrary rules and regulations abound in our daily lives.

You can neither question nor report them; you have to 'kindly adjust'. **Jayeeta Mazumder** lists some absurd unsaid rules that interfere with our freedom in big and small ways

I

In 1980, maverick filmmaker Satyajit Ray made *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, a film that resonates to this day. He showcased a dystopian land ruled by a despotic king, where everyone spoke in rhymes, except the school teacher (the dashing Soumitro Chatterjee) who represented a free-thinking mind and therefore spoke in free verse. A huge part of the narrative highlighted absurd societal rules that were to be spoken about in hushed tones—not very different from the ones in the world we inhabit today. Rules that are bent for the elite, the rich and the majority, and discriminate on the basis of caste, class, colour, diet or sexual orientation. They are not listed in any legal documents and yet you face them, with little or no support from authorities.

CLOSED-DOOR POLICY

A little boy was recently thrown out of a reputed fast food chain in Pune because he was in soiled clothes and wanted to buy a Fanta float. The beggar boy was accompanied by a woman who wanted to buy him the drink. But he was apparently shown the door. "These kinds of people are not allowed inside," the staff is reported to have told her. Malls, restaurants, shops, all reserve the right to entry. A certain strata will never be allowed in, even if they have earned a few rupees to buy themselves that below-average burger. This sort of classist unspoken ban is truly the worst kind. »

WORST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.
BEST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.

WANTED: SKIPPER FOR A GIRL GANG
BACKPACKING THROUGH EUROPE.

If you're a Femina reader between 25 and 40, have a passport, and think you know Europe like the back of your hand, you could be leading a gang of girls on an all-expenses-paid, 15-day trip across Europe. Visit the Femina page on Facebook to win a spot on the next trip of the six we've lined up.





MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE, PLEASE!

A few months ago, the Mumbai police rounded up 61 people—including several married couples—from their hotel rooms, charging them with 'indecent behaviour'. Support for the hapless couples flooded social media even as the moral, er, Mumbai police went about clarifying they had made the arrests on legal grounds. No sir, you didn't, thundered the country's virtual irate lot as well as the media. This July, the Supreme Court clarified for the nth time: "In the present time, a live-in relationship has become an acceptable norm. It is not a crime." A majority of landlords all over the country still ask most young couples to produce marriage certificates. And if you aren't flaunting the hallowed vermillion in your middle parting or any other sign of holy matrimony, you can forget about getting that flat.

RENTED TO THE RELIGIOUS

No boyfriends, male friends or minority communities please.

A friend of mine was once informed by a broker that he wouldn't be able to show her flats in an area she'd zeroed in on because she's a Christian. Several brokers get diktats from landlords that they'd like 'nice' people from 'nice' families with 'nice' family values. 'Nice' behaviour excludes partying at night, wearing short skirts and/or eating meat.

CLUB CLASS

You pay a king's ransom to get yourself that coveted membership in your city's oldest, swishest club and introduce yourself into a little elite circle. Clubs, by definition, are exclusive. But what happens when their rigid rights of admission uphold



the most unreasonable forms of discrimination? Even if you have deep pockets and are willing to queue up for the long waitlist, there's no guarantee that your entry will be smooth. Most of these clubs originated during the British Raj and you'll find traces of that hangover in some of their age-old rules and regulations. According to sources, the Tollygunge Club in Kolkata, the Delhi Gymkhana and the Bangalore Club don't allow their members' domestic help or children to enter the club's main buildings, but there are separate kids' play areas.

POLITICS ON YOUR PLATE

Meat, as our learned politicians will tell you, is the root cause of all things terrible—it stirs up destructive urges in the human body. It must be purged at all cost from your restaurants and your homes. Several areas in India are supposedly designated vegetarian. You may not find meat shops or fish markets within a kilometre or more of these places. You may not even rustle up a non-vegetarian meal in your own kitchen, if your apartment's society deems it wrong. Reports state that several such pockets have surreptitiously begun to shut their doors on carnivores.

**A MAJORITY OF LANDLORDS STILL ASK
MOST YOUNG COUPLES TO PRODUCE
MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES.**

The nanny diaries

She's the reason Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner's 10-year marriage ended a few months ago.

Now, former nanny Christine Ouzounian—who had an affair with Ben—has been offered \$1 million (₹6.6 crore) to play Batwoman in a porn parody. Ben, who stars in *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, was forced to deny rumours of a fling with the nanny. But Ben and Christine have been spotted together since. The porn project has been mooted by producer and director Axel Braun as a sequel to his *Batman v Superman XXX: An Axel Braun Parody*. Christine's role is reported to include three sex scenes over a two-week filming schedule.





Matching up to him
would be a tall order

WHO'S GOT A DADDY COMPLEX?

Freud calls it 'repetition compulsion'—we are compelled to repeat what we see in childhood. This also explains why so many of us have daddy issues. Did you have an overprotective dad or one who wasn't around much? Chances are, your choice of partner will be affected by this. Take this quiz to find out more. By **Deepa Suryanarayan**

1. HOW OFTEN DO YOU TALK TO YOUR DAD?

- ☐ **a** Several times a day. He calls me often to ask me where I am and when I will get back home. He also gives great advice... Excuse me, I have to answer a call right now.
- ☐ **b** Sometimes it's just via text, and sometimes it's a quick call to butter

How does this work?

"Women are more likely to end up with men whose characteristics—positive or negative—are like their father's. It's not because they find those qualities attractive. It's because when they meet a guy they subconsciously think, 'My father did it and it's a normal part of being a man so I'm going to tolerate it.' They think that's the social norm, because it went on in their household." —Psychologist Sutapa Dutt

him up before I use his credit card.

- ☐ **c** We don't talk that often. I see him when I visit home and that's pretty much it.

2. YOU ARE ATTRACTED TO...

- ☐ **a** Men twice your age or older. The salt 'n' pepper look is so sexy.
- ☐ **b** Age does not matter. It's just a number, after all.
- ☐ **c** Any man. All men are your target audience.

3. WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITY YOU LOOK FOR IN A MAN?

- ☐ **a** Someone with big biceps, who can save you and protect you from the rest of the world.
- ☐ **b** Loyalty ranks pretty high.
- ☐ **c** It's all about the looks. The hotter the better.

4. WHEN YOU MAKE PLANS WITH YOUR PARTNER BUT HE DOESN'T ANSWER CALLS, DO YOU...

- ☐ **a** Freak out and message him every five minutes to find out where he is.
- ☐ **b** Leave a message for him so that he can get back to you when he can.
- ☐ **c** Make plans with male friends instead. Two can play this game.

5. IF YOUR PARTNER IS AWAY ON A BUSINESS TRIP FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS, HOW OFTEN CAN YOU GO WITHOUT HEARING FROM HIM?

- ☐ **a** I expect him to WhatsApp several times a day. There's always time for a quick message, right?

b ☐ I don't need to be in touch with him all the time. It's just a couple of days.

c ☐ WTH! Phone calls, WhatsApp, Skype and Snapchat—he better be there for me all the time.

6. TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT YOUR FACEBOOK PROFILE PICTURE. WHAT DO YOU SEE?

a ☐ Both my cover photo and my profile picture are of myself. About 90 per cent of them are selfies. I know my angles better than anyone. Plus, I like to put pictures of me as a baby.

b ☐ Most of my profile pictures are of me and my bestie. My cover photo is a pretty landscape.

c ☐ My profile pictures are a slideshow of my love life and all the different boyfriends I have had.

7. YOUR FRIENDS ARE...

a ☐ Mostly girls. Daddy says boys only want one thing.

b ☐ A pretty decent

mixture of guys and girls.

c ☐ Mostly guys. I've never really gotten along with girls. They are usually jealous of how popular I am with the boys.

8. WHEN YOU MEET A GUY, WHAT IS THE ONE QUESTION YOU ASK YOURSELF?

a ☐ Would Daddy approve of him? Does he have a job that my parents would like?

WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO END UP WITH MEN WHO ARE LIKE THEIR DAD.



b ☐ How he makes me feel—does he appreciate that I am an independent woman?

c ☐ How much attention does he pay me?

9. FOR A NIGHT OUT, YOU WEAR...

a ☐ Something blue, it's my daddy's favourite colour.

b ☐ An LBD.

c ☐ Whatever's available within arm's reach. Usually, it is something skimpy.



Gameplaying just got weird

Mostly As: You are daddy's little girl

Your umbilical cord is connected to your father. No one's ever going to be as wonderful as the man who raised you. No man can fill your father's shoes. That's probably why a relationship longer than two months is long-term to you. Your special relationship with your father probably borders on creepy. And that has turned you into a spoiled brat with a superiority complex. It's time to come back to earth, which, by the way, does not revolve around you.

Mostly Bs: You are a free-thinking, independent young lady

Congratulations! Your daddy got his act right. You know that attention from male figures is great and you love having fun as much as the next girl, but you know your priorities too.

Mostly Cs: You are an attention-seeker

You've spent a lot of time seeking your dad's attention. And clearly haven't received enough of it. Your father was either absent in your life completely, or physically present but emotionally unavailable. No wonder you are so jealous and clingy. To you, sex is power and a tool that gets you attention. But with this approach, you'll only attract men who are only interested in sex, and your daddy issues will continue. Recognise this pattern and end it right now. ■

LOVE PALMISTRY

Shake his hand, yes. But look at it closely to find out if he'll be great in bed. We tell you how

What's sex when you don't have a bit of fun with it? Take a break from reading all the serious relationship mending stories we have for you and lighten the mood.

A LARGE THUMB

The thumb is considered the most powerful digit of all because it controls all the other fingers. A large thumb shows strong sexual energy and a domineering nature. A small-thumb person is a quieter person who finds it hard to speak up in about their sexual needs.

LITTLE FINGER

More specifically, the lower zone on the little finger reveals the most about his sexuality. When this area is extra large and extremely plump, it could mean multiple orgasms for you.

A long little finger can show good ability to communicate and be verbally, sexually and emotionally mature in relationships.

MOUND OF VENUS

It is found at the base of your thumb. An extra full mound with lots of thick, soft yet firm flesh reveals a passionate person who'll be good in bed. The firmer, the better. But it shouldn't be hard. If it is over-developed, it means he is oversexed.


BUT WHAT ABOUT HIS HEART?

When his heart line reaches only the ring finger, it is considered a very short, indicating that he is quite unreliable in love.



When the heart line touches his index finger, it indicates that marriage and family are important to him.



When the heart line is split at the end, it indicates that he is the sort who takes relationships seriously. He is likely to invest time and effort into your relationship. 

queen of lotions,
potions, solutions

damsel-in-distress
-in-denial

social media
butterfly

recovering
bingoholic

For all the women you are
FEMINA

There's no reason why you should settle for mediocre sex when you could be having a fantastic time every time. Whether it's your first time or a one-night stand, having quality nooky is no biggie if you follow our rules.



SITUATION: WHEN YOU'RE HAVING SEX FOR THE FIRST TIME

What to do: First-time sex is not always a momentous occasion heralded by shooting stars and drum rolls. More likely, it's going to be about uncertainty and awkwardness made worse by unrealistic, grandiose expectations. The best way to ensure that first time sex is a pleasurable experience is to chill and enjoy the moment and not let apprehension and anxiety take over. "Take it slow and easy," says Dr Avani Tiwari, senior consultant and sexologist, Metro Multispeciality Hospital, Noida. "Don't rush or force yourself. And do not get drunk to conquer anxiety. You want to have some rocking action, not pass out in a stupor. And get knowledgeable about intercourse. There's nothing more off-putting than a clueless partner." So start your sex 101 tutorial right away.

TIP:

He is as unfamiliar with your body as you are with his, so ask for what you want, show him how to pleasure you, enjoy every feeling and caress deeply and reciprocate.



SURE-FIRE RULES FOR GREAT SEX

Why settle for plain ol' sex when you can have great in-the-sack action in every situation, says **Anindita Ghosh**



SITUATION: WHEN YOU'RE IN THE MOOD FOR ADVENTURE

What to do: Vanilla sex is like comfort food. Good stuff that fulfils your cravings but still leaves you wanting more interesting options. "My husband is good in bed but doesn't want to experiment beyond doggy style, whereas I would love to try stuff like role play and blindfolds," says Sreemoyi Sen, 29, journalist. "The last time I wanted him to try a new position he threw his back out. It has been even more difficult to get him to try anything ever since then." While experimentation and variety are key to a healthy and exciting sex life, you do have to ensure that your partner is on the same page. Forcing him to try something if he is uncomfortable is unfair. "If you want him to try something new, you first need to gauge whether he is ready for some adventure," says Dr Rajesh Goyal, consultant psychiatrist, Sir Gangaram Hospital. "If he seems averse to the idea, make him comfortable by discussing it thoroughly. If you surprise him, things may not go as planned. Besides being stressful, you have to realise that sexual injuries like penile fractures are not uncommon."

FYI:

A 2014 study in the Journal of Urology says woman-on-top positions are the most risky for men and can lead to penile fractures.



SITUATION: WHEN YOU'RE REKINDLING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

What to do: It is quite common for long-term relationships to settle into a sort of sexual rut where there is low frequency of lovemaking and little variety. Add children, demanding careers, and the stress of everyday life and you have even greater challenges to overcome in order to maintain a fantastic sex life. However, the good news is that it's super easy to re-spark your love life if you put your mind to it. And we mean that literally. As sexologists are so fond of saying, "The most powerful sex organ is your brain and it can be schooled and trained back to a sexual state." "Adding to your sexual routine can spice it up considerably," says Mumbai-based sexologist Dr Raj Brahmabhatt. "Try multiple sexual positions to break the monotony, try some role play, opt for sensory deprivation...the options are endless." They really are! Play out your most outrageous sexual fantasies, go on a dirty weekend out of the city where your only agenda is sex, pretend that you are on a first date and can't wait to get your hands on each other, play adult games like strip poker, sext each other and more.

TIP:

"Love and sex never die. They only take a back seat to everyday worries. Forget your differences and re-direct that energy to sex," says Dr Goyal.



SITUATION: WHEN YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A ONE-NIGHT STAND

What to do: The very thought of a one-night stand conjures up images of meeting a sexy stranger at a bar, hitting it off instantly and then having the best sex of your life in a strange hotel room. It's the sheer joy of having sex for the sake of it without having to worry about whether he's the marrying kind or if he's really into you. However, one-night stands can also lead to a lot of anxiety, which is a mood-killer. "I had a one-night stand with one of my outstation colleagues when we met at a conference," says Brinda Singh, 35, project director. "While he seemed to be pretty thrilled with the sex, it could have been better since most of the time I was so tense about whether he would spill the beans to the rest of the team. Thankfully, he didn't, but I realised that a one-night-stand should only be had with someone you truly have no chance of meeting again." According to Dr Tiwari, "No commitment sex, one-night stands and friends with benefits are very tricky issues. Be sure you and your partner are clear about the situation. Many people have trust issues in these situations."

TIP:

Do not forget contraception; you don't want an unwanted pregnancy or, worse, an STD. Carry your own condoms; don't rely on your partner.



WEIRD SEX AROUND THE WORLD

And you thought what your friend did last week was strange. We look at weird global nookie fetishes, starring the mothership of all things weird, Japan



A FEMALE MASTURBATION BAR

In the streets of Tokyo's Shibuya district, Love Joule, a love and sex bar dedicated to women, offers a space to relax and gossip over a cocktail while checking out their range of colourful sex toys for sale. The bar operates a no-men policy, unless accompanied by a woman, and aims to help dissipate the taboos around female masturbation in Japanese culture.

500-PEOPLE ORGY

Clearly, the previous world record of 499 people in an orgy wasn't enough. So Japan decided to one-up that record by producing a 500-person orgy. And of course, being the smart businessmen they are, the producers released a DVD that you can purchase.

EYEBALL-LICKING FETISH

Also known as oculolinctus, this has become a popular way of inciting sexual arousal in Japan. It was first reported when a school noticed that students were coming into class wearing eye patches. One-third of all 12-year-olds at the school has indulged in oculolinctus. The trend was allegedly inspired by a music video of Japanese band Born. >



ALL HAIL THE NETHERLANDS

In an effort to grant physically-disabled citizens the chance to experience sexual intimacy, the government of Holland provides them with a monthly stipend with which to visit prostitutes in Amsterdam's red light district, De Wallen. Handicapped subsidies for adult companionship are also given in Germany.

DON'T KISS THE BLARNEY STONE

The little island of Inis Beag, off the coast of Ireland, is considered to be one of the most sexually repressed societies. Adults keep their underwear on during all sexual encounters and people consider intercourse to be hard on their health.

A WOMAN AND A FISH WALK INTO A BAR

In the Mehinaku village in Brazil, men compete for sex with women by giving them gifts of fish.

IF YOU CAN'T DANCE, QUEUE HERE

Colombia's Guajiro people have a ceremonial dance. If a woman trips a man during the dance, they must have sex. Time to cancel those dance lessons, people.



Men do get more than women: **For men, sex burns between 100 and 200 calories on average.** On the other hand, it burns only around 69 calories for women.

Golden years and how: For those who are wondering if their grandparents and great-grandparents still have sexual intercourse, the overwhelming answer is yes. **Approximately one-third of women in their 80s continue to have sex with their husband, given good enough physical health.**

Cardio-tascular! **At orgasm, both men and women tend to have a heart rate of approximately 140.** This is not excessive, but just enters the common cardiovascular zone.

Can I touch you...there? **Approximately 1 per cent of women can achieve full orgasm solely through stimulating their breasts.**

ACROSS THE WORLD

AGALMATOPHILIA: 'My girlfriend is a doll' becomes a reality in this condition, the clinical name for someone in love with a mannequin, doll or statue.

SALIROPHILIA: 'Let's do the dirty' just got real. Instead of showering before sex, people who have this fetish like the idea of getting dirty during sex by smearing makeup, messing hair up or ripping clothing.

HYBRISTOPHILIA: This one is when women are attracted to criminals, even those who are serving time for some horrific crime. Dr Ian Kerner, a New York City sex therapist, says this phenomenon occurs "usually if the criminal is attractive and has some notoriety".

ODAXELAGNIA: *Twilight* fans, you don't have to have a vampire fetish to have this—where you like being bitten or biting your partner.

AUTOANDROPHILIA: "Man, I feel like a woman." Shania Twain would have been stumped by this one, where women are turned on by dressing up as or imagining themselves as men. **F**



I have been seeing my boyfriend for five months now and we've just started having sex. The last couple of times, his condom came off inside me. Are we doing something wrong? This has never happened to him or me in the past.

Pallavi, Mumbai

This could happen if your boyfriend loses stiffness in the midst of sex (because of any distractions), if you're overly lubricated, or if you have a lax vagina (leading to loosening of peno-vaginal grip, which, in turn, causes softening of erection). It could also happen (rarely) in case your boyfriend's penis is very slender and the condom is not snug enough, causing it to come off. This happens to many people, there's nothing to worry about.

Note: In case you're keeping your legs wide apart during sex, you could cross them to provide better grip, which will avoid any softening of your boyfriend's erection.

What exactly is squirting? I've read up on it, but I am still unclear.

Reshma, New Delhi

Usually, when a man has an orgasm, he ejaculates. This comes out in jerks or spurts, and doesn't ooze out. This is called squirting of ejaculation. The intensity of this reduces as the man's age advances.

Note: Women usually do not ejaculate like men. Very few women ejaculate at the time of climax and this phenomenon is also termed squirting.


I'm a 30-year-old heterosexual woman. I'm single and sometimes watch porn to get excited. I get turned on by girl-on-girl porn. Is that weird?

Devika, Kolkata

This is not weird at all. It is the act that turns you on or the people in it or sometimes even both. It is all about an individual's preference.

After being engaged for six months, we got married seven months ago. We didn't want to have sex during our courtship. Since we are practically newly-weds, we shouldn't have trouble keeping our hands off each other. But he'd rather masturbate than have sex. I've tried talking to him, but it's like talking to a brick wall. Are we destined for a horrible sex life?

Ashwini, Pune

Masturbation involves fantasies. And some men find fantasies more colourful than reality and hence enjoy masturbation. However, after marriage, he can masturbate but not at the cost of your total dissatisfaction. You have the right to be sexually satisfied by your husband, so make some extra efforts to express your sexual deprivation to him, especially when he is in a pleasant mood and receptive to what you're saying. If that fails, consult a competent sex therapist or counsellor. 

Rachna Kothari is a counselling psychologist and marriage therapist. She specialises in marital and sex-related concerns. Email your queries to her at femina@wmm.co.in with Sex Talk in the subject line.





STAY RELEVANT

Even when you're out of commission, being seen and associated with the right people or causes can do wonders for your career. Kajol hasn't been consistently making films, but she's always around, whether it's appearances on *Koffee With Karan* or speaking at the UN. Once known for shunning the sycophantic Bollywood circuit, she is now also seen at important events and parties.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK

There was a time when frumpy was the word used to describe her style. But look at her now! Her fresh sense of style is courtesy Triparna Majumdar, who used to be her personal stylist. "That she is an actress, not a model, makes it important for me to ensure her personality isn't overshadowed by the clothes," Triparna has said. "She has had a lot of people ask her why she didn't fuss over her looks earlier. Earlier, the directors were happy with her natural look. Now, she is in the mood to experiment."



Kajol's makeover is like no other

“KAJOL HAS HAD A LOT OF PEOPLE ASK HER WHY SHE DIDN'T FUSS OVER HER LOOKS. BUT NOW, SHE IS IN THE MOOD TO EXPERIMENT.”

TRIPARNA MAJUMDER
KAJOL'S FORMER STYLIST

GET FIT

The change in perception kicked off when Kajol signed up trainer Shereveer Vakil to chart out her fitness regimen. In just a few months, Shereveer helped her shed 18 kg two years ago. "She is not into unhealthy dieting. She has five meals a day and trains hard. Her performance improves each day," he has said. "Kajol trains like an athlete."

OF COURSE, IT HELPS IF YOU'RE TALENTED

Few actors—hell, people—can last long-term if they're not good at what they do. Kajol is a powerhouse performer and can pull off most roles with plenty of ease. That's probably why she's constantly asked when she's going to make a comeback. **f**

STAY ON TOP LIKE KAJOL

Despite her long career, Kajol is still Bollywood's beloved darling. Here's how she's never lost her equity



Don't do a Sushmita

While her personal life is going great, Sushmita Sen has struggled to replicate her success at work. After her films didn't do great business, she launched a beauty pageant. Since that didn't work out either, she's now on TV judging a comedy show.



Learn from Aishwarya

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan is one of those actors who is always in demand. She's managed to maintain the mystery around her, which makes the press and the audience always want more of her.



Did you just
call me your
little pressure
cooker?

EASE THE PRESSURE ON YOUR KIDS

Identify with the *Battle Hymn Of The Tiger Mother*? Find out if you fall into the pushy parent category and fix the problem

The aim of the average Indian parent is clear. Their child should go to a good school, get into a good college and finally get a good job. This means that right from the start, expectations from the child are immense. Whether it was how you were raised, a feeling that they need an extra push, or wanting them to achieve things you weren't able to, it's important to provide encouragement without causing them more

stress than they can handle. Here's how you can be a different Indian parent:

WHEN YOU ALWAYS CRITICISE

Constantly pointing out what your child did wrong is a high-pressure tactic. Imagine how your son feels when he comes home proud to have gotten a 15/20 on a maths exam and all you say is: Why didn't you get 19 marks?



The message he hears is that he has to be perfect.

The fix: Compliment the scraggly stick figure your son drew in art class or the way your daughter held the door open for her grandparents. "It is easier to motivate your child when you are not inflicting your will on her," says psychologist Dr Sutapa Dutt. "It is very, very important to be proud of whatever your child has accomplished. If she thinks she can do better, help her study or change the way she studies."



WHEN THERE'S TOO MUCH ON HER PLATE

Most parents tend to enter their children into several activities, often based on their own interests and not the child's. If you don't want the chess board to collect dust, maybe you should learn how to play the game better.

The fix: Schedule some off time. With school itself being so busy, kids need downtime. "Understanding their natural strengths and capitalising on them will ensure you have a happy child," says Dr Dutt.



WHEN YOU MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS

You're the adult, so naturally you think it's your right to make all the decisions. But when your son wants to play cricket and you insist he chooses tennis, your child might well be feeling stifled.

The fix: Children grow when they learn how to take decisions on their own. "My daughter wanted to learn drawing," says Nidisha Srinivasan. "But I've always wished for her to learn ballet. But Kiara just sat in a corner on most days in ballet class." Nidisha realised Kiara was not enjoying ballet and has enrolled her in art class.

Signs you are putting pressure



You're sure every situation is life-altering: Saying, "Unless you score the most runs in the game, your coach won't want you to play again," or "How will you manage higher maths if you can't get the basics right?" tells your child they only have one chance to get it right. Life's full of second chances, so don't worry.



You compare your child to others: Comparing your child to other kids all the time puts her in constant competition mode and undermines her achievements. So no more of, "Your sister was a class topper because she studied all the time".



You get angry often: When kids don't meet your expectations, it causes you to get frustrated. If you lose your temper because your child isn't performing as well as you'd like, you may be putting too much pressure. **F**

permanent resident
of the 60s

backyard
environmentalist

nobody's
fool

every little niece's
favorite aunt

For all the women you are
FEMINA



Open a bank account:

Helping your domestic staff become financially

secure is the first step to being a good employer. Start by opening a bank account for her. This will help her reap benefits from her income in the long run and ensure there's no misuse of her salary. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana offers a zero balance savings account that comes with an ATM card. It also offers accident insurance cover of ₹1 lakh, life insurance cover of ₹30,000, without a minimum balance requirement. Help her procure the requisite Aadhar card and PAN card, and teach her to use a debit and an ATM card.



Get her

insured: Take care of her medical expenses,

take her to a doctor if she falls ill too often and sign her up for an annual medical check-up. You could sign her up for the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna, the government's cashless insurance scheme, which provides health insurance of up to ₹30,000 in empanelled hospitals. The premium is funded by the government. Each family has to pay ₹30 to register.



Incentivise:

Break her chores down into manageable tasks. Reward her

in the form of bonuses, time off or a gift. Everyone responds positively to incentives. "My domestic help has been with us for seven years now," says Sheela Chakraborty, a mother of two. "I give her little gifts once in a while, apart from festival bonuses. It's a win-win for both of us."



Family matters:

While you don't have the right to pry into her personal life, you should enquire about her husband and kids every now and then. If a part of her salary goes into her kids' education fees, visit their school and deposit her cheque in a bank yourself.

Her salary should never fall in the wrong hands. Help her husband find a job if he is unemployed.




Let the season of goodwill last all year

ARE YOU A GOOD BOSS AT HOME?

Paying salaries on time isn't enough. Go beyond the customary employer-domestic help relationship and you'll see why her support will always be rock-solid. By **Jayeeta Mazumder**

Respect, respect, respect:

Treating someone like an equal goes a long way in earning their respect. Ask questions about her life and her family, and share some of your stories too. Once she sees that you value her as a person, she'll be more likely to open up and have greater respect for you. "My domestic help would often come to work with bruises and I knew something was wrong. But she'd never admit it," recalls Rhea Bal, a copywriter at an advertising agency. "One day, I sat her down and told her how I opted out of an abusive relationship, and she broke down. Her husband would come home drunk and physically abuse her. I gave her the courage and support to report him to the cops. Today, she's divorced and happy." 



DON'T EVER...

Compare her with previous helpers.

Give her more work than she can manage.

Hit her or reprimand her in a tone you wouldn't otherwise use on others.

Give her food that you think is too old for you to eat.

Give her extra tasks unless you pay overtime.

Ask her to sit on the floor and not on the sofa.



Every woman has or will face some form of physical or sexual threat in her lifetime—far too many unnerving statistics on crimes against women prove this point. And while it may be decades or centuries before the world becomes a safer place for us, there are several things we can—and must—do to protect ourselves.

Having awareness and sharp reflexes is essential. “It’s the small things that matter,” says Anaisha Patch, personal trainer with a second degree black belt. “Exuding confidence is essential. Body language really does make a lot of difference,” she continues. “Displaying fear can make you an easy target.”

While we would never wish to be attacked, “Visualising dangerous scenes in your mind and playing out how you would want to react helps,” says Anaisha. Contrary to popular belief, it’s not essential to know martial arts to be able to protect yourself. “Martial arts do teach you a series of movements,” Anaisha explains, “but unless you’ve been training for about four or more years, they might not be of immediate help.” While a self defence course will equip you to

GET SAFE QUICK

A good defence is the best offence—this holds true not just for sports but for physical safety as well. **Suchita Parikh-Mundul** finds out more

Building mindfulness and agility

Being mindful of the present helps enhance your presence of mind, which in turn, helps you remain calm in the face of danger. Spend five minutes each morning noticing your breathing, your body and ambient sounds, to make a heightened sense of awareness a natural mechanism. “Meditational techniques help sharpen focus and awareness, enabling the right frame of mind to handle physical danger,” says Dr Komal VS, proprietor of Mumbai MMA 24/7, a martial arts academy. Adults should ideally exercise for 30 minutes a day. Exercises like swimming and walking help build stamina and agility, get the blood flowing and release endorphins that enhance mental prowess as well.

deal with such situations, there are several other things you can do to be safe that don’t require intense training.

Flight, not fight

It may sound like a cowardly thing to do, but the safest thing if you’re attacked is to try to get away, and get help. Run at the first chance you get.

Be on your guard

If you find yourself in a physical altercation, get into the boxer’s stance—your forearms up in front of your face, with your hands ready in fists. This helps protect your face, and especially your throat. You’ll be able to protect ▶

THE VITALS LISTED BY DR KOMAL VS



Punch the bridge of his nose to make it bleed



Jab his throat (larynx) with a knuckle jab



Knee or kick his groin, depending on the distance between him and you



Injure his knees, shins or toes, these are sensitive too

Everyday safety



Ensure that someone knows where you're going and for how long.



If you suspect danger from your cabbie, stay calm and firmly ask him to stop the cab.



If you're in an elevator and fearful, press the buttons of several floors. You are not likely to be assaulted if the door keeps opening.



Dress according to the transport you're taking and the destination you're headed to. It's the sensible thing to do.



When walking alone at night, be aware of any shadows.



Walk in public areas or places where you see policemen.



If you're in a crowded bus and feel a man groping you, raise your voice.



Even if you're being dropped at your building gate by a friend, if it's late, ask that they wait till you reach your flat.



FOLLOW THE FIGHT CLUB RULES— STRIKE FIRST, STRIKE HARD, AND STRIKE AS MANY TIMES AS YOU CAN.

your ribs as well. And though this stance may make you look like you're cowering weakly, it puts your assailant off his guard, which gives you the secret upper hand.

Stand firm

Plant your feet apart diagonally and make sure they're wide enough to give you good balance. This will make it that much more difficult for him to knock you down. Avoid falling at all costs.

Is he armed?

If he has one arm to the side or is hiding it behind his back, he could be holding a knife or gun. If this is the case, your best bet is to run for help.

Is he a mugger?

If he has a weapon and what he's after is your wallet, don't hesitate to give it to him. Throw it away

from you and run. Your life is not worth the money. You can always get your cards cancelled later.

Does he want to sexually assault you?

If he has a knife, try to stay at arm's length so he doesn't injure you. If you get wounded, it will make escaping that much more difficult. If you see a gun in his hand, run away from him in a zigzag fashion and call out for help.

Physical defence

"The goal is to diffuse a confrontational situation and keep it from becoming violent," guides Dr Komal VS. Try to talk yourself out of the danger. Saying things like you have a black belt in karate or that you have connections with the police or politicians could deter the attacker. The next step is to defend yourself physically. Follow the fight club rules—



How to fall

If you've been pushed and are about to fall, Dr Komal VS says, "Learn to roll and take your attacker down with you to reduce the impact. Avoid landing on your head to avoid a concussion."

Get armed

"I keep a penknife on me to feel safer, and I've learned how to use it," says Anaisha. Dr Komal VS adds, "Use tools around you to your advantage." A heavy handbag or the spokes of your earrings can also cause harm.

Helpline

It makes sense to save some local helpline numbers in your phone in case of emergencies. However, you may not have the time to find the one you want in a dire situation. Here are a couple to keep on your quick-dial list: **1091** can be dialled toll free across India **103** in Mumbai.

Emergency apps

There are several ingenious apps that can help you stay safe. These are just a few that send out your location to a pre-programmed list of contacts:

1. VithU
2. SuspectsRegistry
3. BSafe
4. Pukar—it also dims the screen to avoid bringing attention to the phone.
5. Raksha—when you don't have access to the internet, it sends out an SMS
6. Scream alarm—when activated, it lets out a woman's scream that will scare assailants for sure.

strike first, strike hard, and strike as many times as you can. Kneeing him or kicking him in the groin will incapacitate him. If you're being choked, use your legs. Stamp on his feet, kick his shins—you need to get him off balance long enough to create a window for escape. **1**

godmother of
abandoned pets

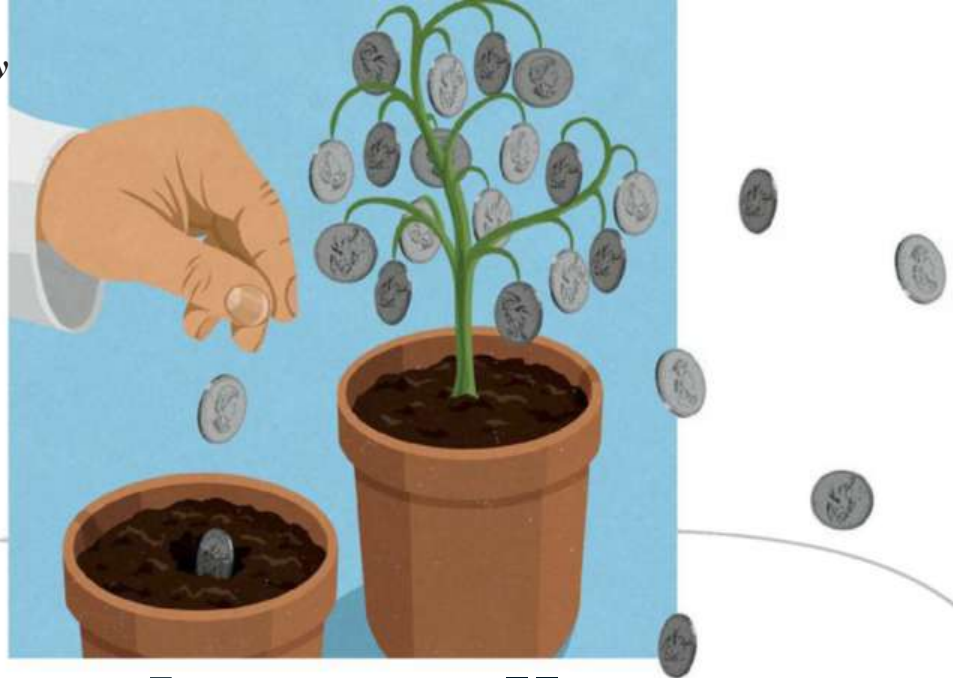
champion
of powerpoint

wizard of odd

many times
bitten,
never shy.



For all the women you are
FEMINA



Grandma tells you how to save right

We know how Granny says she has a solution for everything. Well, she does, even when it comes to managing your bottom line. By **Reema Behl**

IN THEORY, YOU EARN ENOUGH TO SUSTAIN YOURSELF THROUGH EVERY MONTH; BUT LIFE SEEMS TO BE FULL OF MONEY-SUCKING SWAMPS. TAKE A CUE FROM YOUR GRANDMUM, AND LOOK AT HOW SHE FOCUSED ON HER NEEDS AND NOT HER WANTS.

GRANNY TIP 1 DIY ALERT



These days, there are services for everything—from express cleaning services to parlour services at home. Ask yourself if you really want to be so dependent on them. When your grandmum was your age, they did everything themselves (and stayed fit in the bargain too).

HOW TO DIY

Go beauty natural: Scour your kitchen and find beauty solutions that Granny swore by—from lemon juice to fenugreek leaves—you'll find enough to stop you from blowing up money unnecessarily on expensive creams or serums.

Be environment-friendly: Reduce weekly vegetable shopping by growing a kitchen

garden (or in cities, where there is a space constraint, a small patch in the balcony).

Upcycle your clothes: Remember how Granny would use her old saris to create a new one? Before you dump clothes you don't need, see if you can put them to better use. "My husband stitched me a trendy pouch from an old pair of denims and embellished it with stones from an old neckpiece. I use it every day and the money saved on an expensive designer wallet, which I was about to buy, was used for a camping trip," says Bangalore-based Roopa Sharma.

Use technology: Try Pinterest or YouTube videos—from the perfect blow-dry to décor pieces for your room—you'll find it all there.



"I was planning a baby shower for my sister-in-law and decided to hire an event planner. When I heard their exorbitant budget for my small gathering of 50, I decided to take charge. From baking the cake to creating decorative pieces, I had it all sorted. Not only did everyone love the party, I became the de facto event planner for all family events post that."—**Richa Maskara, 28, Femina reader from Delhi**

G ranny would always tuck away some money from the household budget so that her emergency fund was always in place. "With credit cards and endless schemes available today, people are encouraged to spend money they don't even have. No matter how basic it sounds, saving money is the first step towards becoming rich," says Bangalore-based financial expert Dhruv Banglani. "You should keep aside enough cash to cover three to six months of living expenses in your emergency fund," says Surabhi Bhatia, Dehradun-based chartered accountant.

HOW TO BUILD AN EMERGENCY FUND IN SIX SIMPLE STEPS

List your regular monthly expenses: Then figure which ones you can cut.

Assess your income streams: Differentiate between continuous (e.g. salary) and periodic income sources (e.g. money from freelance

GRANNY TIP 2 MONEY SAVED IS MONEY EARNED



projects). Use periodic income to make lump sum investments and the continuous income to make monthly investments.

Thrifty schemes: Time your purchases.

Your keywords are seasonal sales, exchange offers and discount coupons.

Don't procrastinate: That is, when it comes to savings. Start small but start now.

Choose the right home for your emergency fund: "Though a popular choice, a savings bank account in most banks yields an interest of only four per cent per annum that is fully taxable.

A liquid fund account in a mutual fund is more tax-efficient with around five to eight per cent returns per annum, and it can be withdrawn at a very short notice," says Dhruv.

Monitor and assess: Monitor your budget periodically and ensure that your emergency fund is at optimal levels. "Our grannies used pen and paper; you have apps like MoneyBook, Toshl, Expenditure, etc to help you," says Surabhi.



"Building my investment fund was a scary thought but once I started, I actually looked forward to devising unique ways to cut down on my spending. The things that made the most difference included car pooling to my workplace instead of taking a cab; switching to apps like TinyOwl, Swiggy, etc, that offer great discounts; and getting the right plan for my mobile phone."—Zeba Khan, 25, Femina reader from Delhi

GRANNY TIP 3 COLLECT AND INVEST



G randmum's kitty schemes ensured a lump sum amount once every few months.

Have your own kitty group within your housing society or circle of friends, and ensure that the money thus collected is used smartly—ideally invested for more returns. "Rather than investing in one area or in appreciating assets like gold, etc, build up a collection of stocks and shares that even if one plummets, the effect on your savings portfolio is minimal," advises Dhruv. Use free online guides like Investopedia. There are many books available on Amazon.in as well—*The Beginner's Guide to Investment* by Pentagon Press or *Stock Market Simplified: A Beginner's Guide to Investing Stocks*, *Growing Your Money* and *Securing Your Financial Future* by Eric Silva.

HOW TO INVEST RIGHT AT EVERY AGE

In your 20s: Start off by differentiating between your short-term and long-term goals.

While short-term goals include paying off the education loan etc, long-term goals include retirement plans, etc. Equities can be a good investment choice as you can take more risk when you are young. Invest in mutual funds for your long-term goals and choose suitable health insurance plans to take care of your medical emergencies. Consider inflation before you plan investments.

In your 30s: Invest in real estate for long-term growth. Investment in gold is also a good option. "Buy gold in the form of coins or bars or invest in gold funds; but not jewellery. Gold in the form of jewellery is only going to cause losses in terms of production or making charges," says Dhruv.

In your 40s: Increase your savings for retirement and your children's marriage or their higher education. Invest in funds that involve lesser risk—transfer a portion of your investment from equity to debt to stay safe of market fluctuations.



"A friend approached me to help her with her start-up idea on crowdfunding. Though I did not even know the meaning of the term, I read up about it and decided to invest almost 40 per cent of my savings. Today, she is in the process of raising her first round of funding and my returns are already valued at almost 10 times my investment."—Prakriti Sharma, 24, Femina reader from Mumbai



one swipe of your credit card and a month later, realisation dawns as you stare at your bill. The hole it will leave in your pocket is too big. Plus you have just invested half a lakh in a depreciating asset. You will spend the next six months repaying your loan in 'not so easy' instalments. And then of course, you have the whopping home loan (who doesn't, nowadays?) to worry about. Breathe and tackle it, one loan at a time.

DEPRECIATING ASSETS

Watch out

A home loan with a hefty EMI is almost unavoidable. However, the good thing about a home loan is that you are paying for an asset that is sure to bring in returns. But what if you are paying a high EMI for a depreciating asset? What's a depreciating asset, you ask? "Your sedan, that superbike you have your eye on, the latest smartphone and even the furniture in your house," says Vinnie D'Lima, auditor at a leading bank in Mumbai. "Your total EMI should not exceed 40 per cent of your monthly take home salary. And if you have a home loan, avoid using your credit card too often," she advises. ➤

IS YOUR EMI TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

There's no such thing as a free lunch. At best, you can buy now and pay later, with a lot of interest. **Deepa Suryanarayan** tells you how to deal with it when your bank demands its pound of flesh

You've given in to temptation and have decided that you want to be a part of the Apple family. But the iPhone 6—last time we checked, was priced at over ₹45,000. So, how do you propose to pay for it—other than by selling

off one of your kidneys illegally, that is? Loans, say banks, rubbing their hands gleefully, can turn your dreams into reality. Whether it is a home, a car or an educational degree abroad, loans play an integral role in defining your goals and achieving them. But where there's a loan, there is an Equated Monthly Instalment (EMI). We tell you what to expect when you sign on the dotted line. After all, sometimes loans can last longer than a marriage, as a banking joke goes.

Credit card payments are loans too

You find yourself shopping for that smartphone with



TOP APPS TO HELP YOU DEAL WITH DEBT

EMI Calculator

Helps you calculate the loan amount you are eligible for, and the EMI you will have to pay, based on the bank's interest rate.

Debt Tracker

Tracks your debt and other financial details so that you can begin to reduce your debt amount. It gives you a clearer picture of your current financial condition.

Debt Payoff Planner

Tracks payments and debts, produces a customised strategy to payoff the loan. It also tells you when you will be debt free.

princess of
all things shoes

3 am pillow-talk
philosopher

secret santa
of office peons

fastest blogger
in the east

For all the women you are
FEMINA



Tackling not-so-easy monthly instalments?

THE LOWER THE EMI, THE LONGER THE TENURE OF THE LOAN, AND THE BIGGER THE INTEREST AT THE END.

The zero per cent interest scheme

Guess what? If it's too good to be true... then it probably is. The zero-interest EMI was something that most sellers were relying on to crack their sales targets, especially during the festive season, until the RBI cracked down on them in 2013. According to the RBI, the interest element was often camouflaged and passed on to customer in the form of processing fees. "Hidden factors in the zero per cent EMI schemes include a sizeable one-time processing fee, fees for documentation, shipping and installation charges, etc," points out Ganesan Ramamoorthy, chartered accountant and an authority on banking and consumer laws.

You also need to check if the scheme is available on all models of the product. If it is not, chances are, the seller/

dealer wants to get rid of old stock. In most cases, the hefty discounts and sales during festive season, are not available when you opt for the zero-interest EMI scheme, which in the long run means you end up paying more.

APPRECIATING ASSETS

Read the fine print

The devil is in the details. Five years after she took a home loan at 10.25 per cent interest, Reema Naik says she has finally understood how it works. "I would advise anyone taking a home loan to first understand the principal and interest component," she says. Find out the maximum EMI you can afford to pay and then minimise the loan duration. Your EMI has more principal component (20-30 per cent) in a short duration than in a long duration (5-10 per cent). So, the lower the EMI, the



TIPS FROM THE FINANCIAL EXPERT

Did you know that many banks have a credit counselling centre that gives free advice? If your debt situation seems out of control, consult a debt counsellor/ financial advisor.

Repay high interest loans first, and then move on to the next. This is called the debt avalanche strategy—it minimises the total interest paid on all loans.

Prioritise repayments, only after considering the tax benefits on some loans. For instance, the interest paid on an education loan is fully tax deductible. Tax benefits can also bring down the actual cost of a home loan.

Every time you get a hike, increase your EMI payment. This can actually reduce the tenure of your loan significantly.



HOW MUCH EMI CAN YOU AFFORD

Home loan EMI

Not more than 40-45 per cent of your income

Auto and personal loan EMI

Not more than 20-25 per cent of your income

Credit card bill

Not more than 10-15 per cent of your income

Total EMI payments

Not more than 40 per cent of your income


longer the tenure of the loan, and the bigger the interest at the end of the tenure. "You should always aim at paying the principal amount along with the interest," says Reema.

Penalties

Many banks levy pre-closure charges on EMI schemes. Such charges add to the cost and reduce flexibility of users in closing the loan and could range between 2-5 per cent of the outstanding principal amount. Another issue is what happens when you default on the EMI—very high penalty charges may be levied.

Should you switch to a new home loan?

In April 2015, at least nine financial institutions—including SBI, HDFC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, ICICI and Axis Bank—slashed their minimum lending rate—from 10 per cent and above to between 9.75-9.85 per cent. This can obviously spell savings in the long run, especially when the tenure of your loan is over 20 years.

"This is to lure new customers. So obviously, the slash in rates benefits the new borrower and not the existing borrower. And this is why, every few years, one needs to review their home loan, to see if there is an advantage in switching to a new home loan," suggests Sunaina Pal, financial advisor, Kriti Financial Consultants. 

HOW TO BE A GOOD FREELANCER

Before you send off your resignation letter in pursuit of greater freedom, more money and frequent naps, **Deepa Menon** tells you what she learned, the hard way, after a year of the freelance life

After eight years of working full-time, I quit to dedicate more time to writing last year. I retained a part-time position at *Femina*, but spent the rest of the time collecting bylines, wherever I could. A year since then, my life has improved in some ways. I walk more and eat less junk. Writing is hard work that I enjoy doing. I can stay up nights reading. Shopping is no longer the drug it once was. And I was able to be there for my family during some pretty big emergencies. On the downside: I miss working in a team. I've had to learn some essential but annoying lessons about living on a budget. All the good things about my previous life were external: pay-cheque, colleagues validation—all the bad things about my current life come from within: a need for reassurance, a reluctance to deny myself anything and an anxiety that is caused by nothing in particular and affects everything in general. Going



introvert freelance. tumblr



It can be hard to learn to price your work, especially if you're in a creative field. A rule of thumb suggested by Jenn Lee on *The Smarter Freelancer* podcast is to ask yourself if the value of your work will translate to three-four times its price.

freelance has been like being in a boot camp; each day I confront a fear, each day I survive. So even if the jury's still out on whether this is the life I want forever, it has taught me some solid life-skills.

KNOW YOUR VALUE

When you're starting out, you will feel unduly grateful to anyone who gives you work. Get over this as quickly as possible. Too much of our self-worth is derived from the people who sign our cheques and the sooner you start seeing these as business

transactions and not personal endorsements, the better you'll work. Okay, end of tough love. It can be hard to learn to price your work, especially if you're in a creative field. You have a number in mind, but how do you know if it's the right one? A rule of thumb suggested by Jenn Lee on *The Smarter Freelancer* podcast is to ask yourself if the value of your work will translate to three-four times its price. For instance, if the press release you're drafting or the website you're designing or the class you're teaching will translate into greater value for your client over time—more media coverage, greater page views, higher enrollments—then you're justified in quoting what you are. With clients you like, find a way to become a long-term contributor by aligning your skills to their goals. ▶

KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY

Come to grips with the realities of the industry you work in. If you're a writer, ask around to find out not just what the per word rates are in the market but also what kind of budgets the editors are working with, and what kind of projects they're pitching for to the guys who sign their cheques.

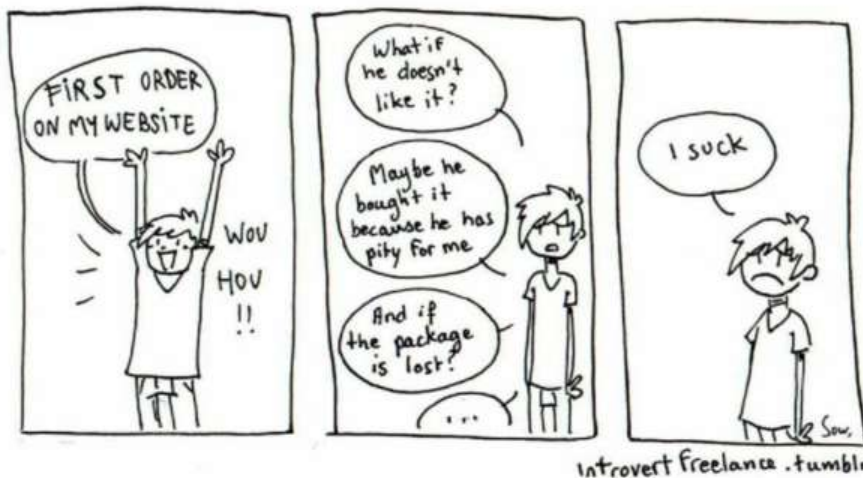
TALK MONEY

Now that you know your price, find a way to name it without being defensive, apologetic or embarrassed. Many women especially struggle with this because we're naturally more empathetic and very averse to burning bridges. But it helps to remember that not all bridges are worth saving. *Femina's* associate ed Akhila Vijaykumar has this insight to offer from her three years as a freelancer: "Some clients won't mind going to a cheaper vendor who won't do as good a job. And I learned that I didn't want to work with them either as I wanted to feel satisfied with the work I was putting out." It can be a difficult conversation to have but not if you're prepared. Check the box to find three unsettling responses that you might get after you have given a client your quote.

SAY NO

The freelancers I spoke to were from different industries but they spoke as one voice when they offered this advice: Don't work with an unreasonable client, no matter how tempted you are by the job/money/brand. It's never worth the heartache. A senior photographer in Bangalore said, "Trust

your gut on this. People who aggrandise themselves in meetings or behave rudely are usually difficult to work with because they'll nit-pick endlessly. You may lose a project here and there, but it's better than being miserable over work already done."



Introvert Freelance .tumblr

SAY IT RIGHT

Client: "That's our budget for the whole project!"

You: "I'd love to work with you, but this is my fee for doing X, Y and Z. If your budget doesn't cover it, perhaps I can contribute towards X for now, which is the most crucial step of the process, and we can talk again when you're working on something bigger."

Client: "Isn't that a bit steep?"

You: "Not when you consider the value you'll be getting. I understand this industry and I've done similar work in the past, so you won't have to hand-hold me through the project or worry about quality."

Client: "Can you just work on this one at our rate and we can increase it for the next project?"

You: "I'm sorry but my price is quite competitive already and I want to be able to enjoy working for you. Do get in touch if anything else comes up that might be suitable for both of us."

and ideas on how it could be marketed creatively (he was self-publishing). This is not my area of expertise but I've always been curious about the publishing industry, so I pitched in anyway I could. Take on a few projects outside your comfort zone and you may find that you now have a new skill to add to your portfolio, or a whole new industry to tap into.

DON'T CHECK FACEBOOK

Scrolling through FB is an addictive form of self-torture. If you're on Facebook for work, put yourself on the clock. If you come across a link you just cannot resist, bookmark it for later. Chances are you'll never get around to reading it because it was not that interesting in the first place.

STAY YOU

Friends with full-time jobs have often asked my opinion on whether they should take the plunge too. As good

as it's been for me, I wouldn't recommend this life to everyone. Not because they can't do it, but because they might not want or need to. There's a tendency these days to justify all our life choices by pretending they are the best ones for people like us. That's not true. If you hate your job, look for a better one. If you can't afford to not have a pay cheque come in every month, hold on a little longer but focus on figuring out a happier situation. The grass isn't greener on my side, it's just different. Payments get delayed, building your brand can be hard if you're shy and even if it's rare, sometimes you have to sit in a meeting, which as we all know is the lowest form of human interaction. Consider what you would be giving up if you quit your full-time job and if you can imagine it without flinching (too much), then come join the club. Happy hours start at 4. **F**



FEMINA

FASHION

FASHION CRIME

The French government recently voted to ban agencies from hiring models below a Body Mass Index of 18 (about 55 kg for a height of 5.7 feet). The parliament also voted to criminalise retouched internet images that alter the model's body. Israel passed a similar law in 2013, as did Madrid and Milan's fashion weeks in 2006. French modelling agencies flouting this new law are likely to be fined, while agents themselves could face imprisonment. However, those within the industry, such as Isabelle Saint-Felix, secretary general of Synam, which represents around 40 modelling agencies in France, have decried the perspective as one that conflates anorexia with thinness. Others have protested that a standard BMI can't work for all models as some girls are just genetically thin.



CHLOÉ



Polyester fringe dress, ₹7,999, Bebe



Woollen poncho, ₹3,990, Zara

COSY UP

These cover-ups are super comfy and come loaded with neat graphic prints and textures



Crystal cuff, ₹27,820, Swarovski



Metal watch, ₹940, Stylefiesta.com



Polyester shirt dress, ₹9,999, French Connection



Ikat weave jacket, ₹4,900, Rena Love



Embroidered bag, ₹4,450, Accessorize



Canvas flatforms, ₹2,890, Call It Spring

STYLE TIP

Opt for classic leather accessories to keep your look luxe.



PACO RABANNE



Embellished blouse, ₹2,995, Vero Moda

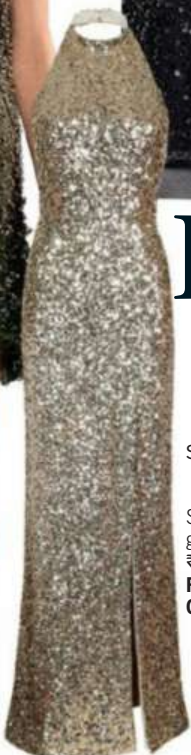


Sequinned jacket, ₹9,100, Marks & Spencer

BRIGHT SPARK

Gold never ages. The one rule for shining bright this festive season? Embellish everything

Sequinned gown, ₹16,999, French Connection



Polyester blend dress, ₹2,699, Giovani



Embellished dress, ₹12,700, Asos



Metallic flats, ₹2,890, Call It Spring



Crystal clutch, ₹3,800, Boga



Metallic peep-toes, ₹3,200, Trèsmode

STYLE TIP

Don't be afraid to mix metals—copper with gold, brass with silver.



CELINE

Polyester dress,
₹5,090,
Aftershock



Polyester
blouse,
₹2,999,
H&M



Polyester
blend and
lace dress,
₹7,999, **Bebe**

CROWD CONTROL

If three is one too many, might as well make it a party Colour blocking in triads is the newest rage, in coats and dresses to bags and jewellery



Metal and
crystal
earrings,
₹3,900,
Aé-Tee

Suede tote,
₹3,990, **Zara**



Wool jumper, ₹3,499,
Marks & Spencer



Woollen pullover,
₹2,895, **Promod**



Viscose dress,
₹5,600,
Forever New



Leather loafers,
₹7,999, **Clarks**

STYLE TIP

If you want to keep your look subtle, play with tones in a similar palette.



Leather detail
sunglasses,
₹4,295, Hidesign



Leather
coin pouch,
₹450, Viari



Leather handbag,
₹12,999, Da Milano



Leather handbag,
₹4,999, Anna Luchini

PALETTE CLEANSER

Luxurious leather accessories come in all colours this winter. Make the unpredictable choice and stand out from the herd



Leather
pumps,
₹7,999,
Dune

Leather sling bag,
₹13,990, Juicy
Couture



Leather
watch,
₹7,995,
Fossil



Leather stilettos,
₹3,590, Dorothy
Perkins @ Jabong.com



Faux leather belt, ₹1,200 (set of 3),
Forever New



RED ALERT

Gemstones that are cherry bright or glisten a deep maroon will ensure you stop traffic

1. Ruby and diamond ring, **TBZ - The Original** 2. Diamond and ruby ear cuffs, **Om Jewellers** 3. Diamond and ruby chandelier earrings, **CaratLane.com**
4. Diamond and ruby earrings, **Gemfields** 5. Diamond and ruby earrings, **Popley Eternal** 6. Diamond and Burmese ruby neckpiece, **Mirari** 7. Diamond and ruby chandelier earrings, **Tara Jewellers** 8. Baguette diamond and ruby chandelier earrings, **Dia Gold** 9. Diamond and ruby neckpiece, **Hema S Kothari**

THE MINIMALISTS

A hint of sparkle, a flash of colour, a sleek form.
Beauty is in the details



Leather and metal
watch, price on
request, Dior



Leather
watch,
₹7,995,
Fossil



Leather and
metal watch,
₹9,795, Skagen



Leather and metal
watch, ₹17,100,
Tissot



Leather and metal
watch, price on
request, Longines



HARD WORKERS
From luxe accessories to structured separates, your office wardrobe just got a promotion

What she wants

When it stifles, curbs your inner style and forcibly fits you into a frame—it's not fashion, not democratic fashion, for sure. Marks and Spencer's Fall/Winter 2015 collection introduces wardrobe winners to don at work or play even as you stay yourself

The real woman's fashion story has been retold many times over. The serious gaps in the tale appear when the clothes ordained for her (by who else, but the fierce fashion pundits) range from convenient but boring to downright meh. That's the fashion conundrum addressed by Marks and Spencer's latest collection, previewed amidst much fanfare in London early this year. While the brand's DNA stays the same, their fresh creations are clearly challenging the rival brands that get more style votes. The way forward was to listen to the consumer, as style director Belinda >



Woollen poncho



Chambray shirt



Faux-leather whipstitch duffel bag



OFF-DUTY COOL

Distressed denims and boho blouses are the epitome of easy, insouciant chic

Earl explained. The brand heard out the consumer's simple demand to give her trendy clothes but in a more solution-oriented way—the clothes should fit, flatter both size and pocket.

The fall/winter 2015 collection has a five-pillar smart strategy showcasing elements across Autograph, M&S Collection, Per Una, Indigo and Limited Collection. The idea is to keep the real woman satisfied with what she trusts the brand with, without losing sight of trends. The sneak peak offered to us clearly headlined the following five trends. The first was Modern Muse—a retro '60s collection of fun >

Distressed denim jeans



Organza and sheer blouse



Metal and stone earrings



Metal and crystal earrings



Woven clutch



Faux-leather and shearling jacket



Polyester blend high-collar dress



Woollen
fedora hat

Faux-fur trim
headband

Silk and lace
camisole
(part of set)



Faux-leather
tote bag

ADD-ONS

From bags to
lingerie, these are
the plus-ones you
need to have in your
wardrobe at
all times

Floral print
silk chemise

Silk and lace
shorts (part
of set)

Silk bra and
silk Brazilian
underwear

prints and modern-day classics with a fresh edge. The next trend we spotted was Softly Structured—easy tailoring in trusted fabrics paired with that free-flowing yet feminine feel. Another trend highlighted was Elegant Bohemia—with downplayed colours, Aztec prints, luxuriant knitwear, and soft suedes with layers. The fourth trend projected was Entwined—a wearable range of detailed separates coupled with contemporary basics. The final trend was Noir—meant for an elegant evening soir  e, brimming with a selection of velvet and lace made emphatic with usage of metallics. Up-to-the-minute trends in convenient easy-on-the-pocket clothing that doesn't tell you to be anybody other than you—what's not to like? 

Metal and
crystal
earrings



Faux-leather
shoulder
box bag



WORST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.
BEST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.

WANTED: SKIPPER FOR A GIRL GANG
BACKPACKING THROUGH EUROPE.

If you're a Femina reader between 25 and 40, have a passport, and think you know Europe like the back of your hand, you could be leading a gang of girls on an all-expenses-paid, 15-day trip across Europe. Visit the Femina page on Facebook to win a spot on the next trip of the six we've lined up.



Forever young

Growing up is tough—and entirely optional, thanks to this year's fashion obsession with childhood. By **Butool Jamal**



(Clockwise from left)
Pop culture icon Sonam Kapoor in a girly dress; a pre-teen styled Papa Don't Preach cardigan; a bubblegum-pink Giorgio Armani gown; schoolgirl checks at Péro by Aneeth Arora; Christian Louboutin's glitter-heeled Mary Janes; a bow-embellished JC sling bag



What does it mean to dress your age? When I was still in school, all

I wanted was to dress like a grown-up—ideally Madhuri Dixit—and have my own pair of heeled shoes, preferably ones that would leave a satisfying, authoritative, click-clack sound in my wake. My mother refused to buy them for me, declaring them too adult, but finally, a friend's mother took on the mantle of fairy godmother and got me a pair. They had a tiny heel and were even covered in gold sparkles; I was now definitely a little closer to being Madhuri Dixit. Flash-forward to the present, where I shrink at the

thought of wearing heels. Instead, I would love a pair of Mary Janes: I dream of Christian Louboutin's baby blue, new season pair but will settle for something from Zara. Those jelly sandals that my mom thought

I looked adorable in as a child? I recently

scouted them out on Koovs. And the Peter Pan-collared woollen frocks that I found so uncomfortable? Giorgio Armani sent out grown-up versions in lavender and mint blue.

When we are younger, we want to project a kind of world-weary knowing. But as we grow older, we often long for the carefree abandon of youth, or even just the sense of ease and comfort of the clothes we wore at the time. And it's not just me; this year, the runways and the high street

AS WE GROW OLDER, WE OFTEN LONG FOR THE SENSE OF EASE AND COMFORT OF THE CLOTHES WE WORE WHEN WE WERE YOUNGER.



“FASHION IS A WAY TO ESCAPE AND THE PAST SEEMS LIKE A SAFE RETREAT.”

were full of clothes that played with fashion's constant fascination with young girls. There were baby doll dresses at Erdem, bubblegum pink skirt sets at Dolce & Gabbana, knee-socks and school-girl checks at Péro by Aneeth Arora and liberal polka dots at Bodice. The past is constantly being quoted and referenced by fashion—on the spring/summer 2015 runway, we saw a '70s revival, while fall/winter 2015 seems to be all about the '80s. Nostalgia is our way of escaping to what we regard as a simpler time, and childhood is the ultimate destination.

(Clockwise from top left) A fairytale-inspired look by Anju Modi; children's drawings on babydoll dress by Dolce & Gabbana; Kangana Ranaut in tween-inspired shorts; a girly dress by Papa Don't Preach; a pre-teen-inspired flower box clutch by New Look; (Right) Lena Dunham's series about 20-somethings called *Girls*

Designer Shubhika Davda of the label Papa Don't Preach elaborates, “I am always nostalgic; a song or even a smell might take me back to my childhood. Fashion is a way to escape and the past seems like a safe retreat.”

At Saint Laurent Paris, creative director Hedi Slimane keeps returning to his fascination for a particular, skinny, androgynous kind of youth. In an interview with *WhoWhatWear.com* he said, “I was precisely just like any of these guys I photograph, or that walk my shows. Jackets were always a little too big for me.”

For some designers, it's the fantasy of childhood stories that serves as inspiration. This season, Anju Modi sent out a fairytale-inspired line. While the clothes were definitely for adults, the models sported tiny tiaras on big mops of hair, conjuring up the image of little girls getting dressed up in their mother's wardrobe. Prada's collection of empire-waist dresses, and shrunken trousers and jackets left the impression that these girls grew out of their clothes too quickly. The show was set to the tune of Walt Disney's *Fantasia*.

Glorified youth is also a part of what fashion sells. It promotes an idea of individuality and self-confidence, which is what makes young people such eager buyers. At the same time, it promises other demographics that if they buy that pair of tiny shorts or the perfect shirt, they might be able to recapture some of that vitality. Chloe marketed its spring/summer 2015 collection with the social media hashtag, #ChloeGirls—reminiscent of a high school clique that you could only join if you wore the right clothes. This season, Moschino sent out a line titled Dolly Pattern, with Lolita-esque baby doll dresses with frilly sleeves and bibs, prints of Looney Tunes cartoon characters and a crayon-box palette of sunshine yellow, electric blue and red. An easily recognisable icon like Bugs ➤





Bunny makes for perfect Instagram fodder, while accessories like the cartoon-covered phone cases are cheap, easy buys.

The problem arises when it's the body of the young girl that becomes the object of fetishisation. Despite getting that vampire facial or pushing yourself at Pilates, you will never reclaim your 20-something physique. For spring/summer 2015, Moschino sent out a line inspired by Barbie, the eternal girl, who has measurements that are impossible to attain. The models we see on the runways are as close as you could get to

THE PROBLEM ARISES WHEN IT'S THE BODY OF THE YOUNG GIRL THAT BECOMES THE OBJECT OF FETISHISATION.

those dimensions. Giraffe-like, flat-chested and waifish with hairless bodies, they are the picture of pre-adolescence. At the same time, the role of underage models in the fashion industry has long been a matter of contention. While internationally, a big publishing house recently vowed not to work with models below the age of 16, girls as young as 14 and 15 still pose for campaigns and open shows for big luxury houses like Dior and Chanel.

In 2012, Kate Moss told *Vanity Fair* about the difficulties of working in a grown-up world as a 16-year-old newbie. "I was staying at a B&B in Milan, and you'd get home from work and there was no food. You'd get to work in the morning, there was no food. Nobody took you out for lunch when I started. Carla Bruni took me out for lunch once. She was really nice. Otherwise, you don't get fed." On the Indian catwalk, it's particularly heartening to see that models continue to walk for big names well into their 30s and 40s. But in an increasingly competitive industry where looks are everything, many are finding out that there's always someone younger to take their place.

Of course, it's not just models who have to squeeze into a pre-teen size. Even pop culture icons like Taylor Swift, Kangana Ranaut or Sonam Kapoor often dress like tweens and are dubbed 'girls' well into their late 20s. Blake Lively, one of the *Gossip Girls*, recently had a child while Shraddha Kapoor, another girly-girl, starred in *Aashiqui 2* that reportedly grossed more than ₹100 crores—definitely grown-up territory, you would think. But the tag has stuck. It's even been reclaimed, thanks to Lena Dunham's trailblazing TV series about the lives of a group of 20-somethings in New York called, what else, *Girls*. The lead characters are far from girls and, in fact, are starting off their careers, living on their own and having relationships like modern, mature women.

No one gets to vote on your style, whether it's a preference for rompers at 30 or a taste for bondage at the age of 50. And as more women gain power in the fashion industry, there's a better chance that we will start to see a shift towards what we really want, rather than what a male-dominated, youth-obsessed industry thinks we want. Then, we'll be really grown up. **■**

(Clockwise from top left) The skinny, androgynous look favoured at Saint Laurent Paris; a baby pink dress by Prada; actor Shraddha Kapoor in a babydoll dress; Miss Bennett London dungarees; a Furla candy-coloured, cartoon-print handbag

queen of lotions,
potions, solutions

damsel-in-distress
-in-denial

social media
butterfly

recovering
bingoholic

For all the women you are
FEMINA



THROUGH THE SEASONS

Rohit Bal is undoubtedly one of India's best loved and recognised designers. **Anindita Ghosh** speaks to the creative genius who has completed over 25 years in the Indian fashion industry

Rohit Bal's reputation as a partying maverick and enfant terrible of the Indian fashion industry precedes him. However, there is much more to the man than this lopsided, uni-dimensional public image. A self-taught designer with a keen sense of aesthetics, Rohit has been producing impeccable garments for more than 25 years now. Embellished with his trademark lotus and peacock motifs, among other things, a Rohit Bal garment is instantly recognisable by its luxurious fabrics, intricate embroideries and Mughal-inspired silhouettes. Unabashedly emotional, especially about his attachment to Kashmir, where he spent his growing years, the designer is also a canny entrepreneur whose ambition and business acumen have helped create an empire with interests in fashion, interiors, luxury homes, bars and lounges.

You are one of the pioneers of the Indian fashion industry. What are your fondest memories of your initial years?



(Clockwise from left) The iconic designer, Rohit Bal; A model in one of his bridal designs; Actor Arjun Rampal looking dapper in a Rohit Bal creation; A sketch from the designer's Gulbagh collection

We were like family. There were so few of us and we were so close to each other. Besides being friends, we were from similar backgrounds and it was all about fun and camaraderie. It wasn't competitive like it is now. It was more of a passion. Of course, eventually, fashion became a big business, but we started out with a desire to express our love for fashion and textiles.

I launched my label 25 years ago. The mid '90s were a great time for Indian fashion. That's when NIFT was launched and there were suddenly these new graduates with textiles and garment backgrounds with knowledge of fashion. People were going abroad to Parsons or Kings or the London

(Below)
A collection
of ties by the
designer



College of Fashion and they wanted to come back and do fashion. Tina and Tarun Tahiliani opened Ensemble and soon there was a domino effect with Mutiny, Glitterati, Aza and Kimaya, all setting up shop. So now, not only were there designers but also places to sell. Everything fell into place and with the simultaneous growth of demand and supply, people became very aware of labels and the Indian fashion designer. Of course, there was the great Rohit Khosla who singlehandedly made the Indian designer fashionable. If it wasn't for his mentoring, I wouldn't have been a designer.

What is your opinion of the Indian fashion industry today?

Well, the fashion industry has become a business. It's fiercely competitive—a rat race that is all about survival. You can't just be someone who makes beautiful clothes. You've got to be able to run a business, market yourself, be competitive, have business acumen, speak well, present yourself well, write well, be great with PR and people... At the end of the day, people are actually buying you as much as they are buying your product. So, you've got to be a product that sells. For me, however, the final strength of a designer is his product. You can manage to take it only so far with a mediocre product. Similarly, you can't keep a good thing down. Unfortunately, today, I see that fashion has become yet another profession—often the last resort of someone who has nothing better to do. People need to realise that it's a full-time business and it's not easy to stay on top. Fashion is very fickle. To be successful, you need to have a lot of grit,

(Clockwise from above)
Actors Katrina Kaif and
Ranbir Kapoor walk
the ramp for Rohit Bal;
Deepika Padukone
wearing the designer's
sari at Cannes; a model
shows off an outfit from
the Gulbagh collection



an incredible amount of knowledge, passion and perseverance. You have got to constantly reinvent yourself and create something that is distinctly yours. That unique identity is a very important aspect of success in fashion.

Have any of the younger designers managed to create this unique identity?

Well, there are quite a few who have done it correctly from the beginning. For instance, Aneeth Arora has an incredible sensibility and I can tell her clothes from a mile off. Then there is Rahul Mishra who, apart from all the awards and the accolades, is actually creating very beautiful things. Fashion designers should stick to their own style and do what they do best and not what everyone else is doing. You are born with a talent and that is what you need to nurture instead of trying to be like someone else.

Technical training or on-the-job experience: what matters most?

You can learn on the job like I did. There is no substitute for experience and learning on the job. You cannot really *learn* fashion, but you can learn technique, and you can learn that technique on the job as well. When I sit with my masters, my cutters and pattern makers, I learn more from them because I am actually doing it with them. I went to fashion school for a bit, but I know that what I do now was all learnt when I was actually working. It is, however, important to read and be knowledgeable about fashion.

You studied history at St Stephen's. How did that education help you?

It didn't, except for the fact that I had a lot of >



(Clockwise from above) The interiors of one of the designer's stores; A bridal lehenga in the making; One of the designer's many ventures—a signature perfume; A model showcasing the designer's creation

time on my hands to do all sorts of things! Well, I am still obsessed with history. The kind of clothes I do are very old-world and costume-based, so being a history student has made me a little more aware of what was happening in a certain culture. I do a lot of Mughal-inspired clothing and studying the Mughals obviously did have an impact on my mind. It also made me aware of the fact that costume and fashion have been really important and not frivolous through the ages, whether we are talking about the reign of Ashoka or the Mauryas, Guptas and Chalukyas. Fashion was very relevant then, as it is now.

You have diversified your brand into every aspect of fashion.

I feel that fashion should not be restricted to clothing—I design everything. We have recently ventured into Rohit Bal Luxury Weddings and also launched a collection of bed linen with Bombay Dyeing, which is available in 400 stores. I am waiting to launch my crystal line that is going to be retailed in our own stores and some other high-end luxury stores. I will also be re-launching a collection called Balance by Rohit Bal, our prêt line. We will ultimately be opening about 45-50 stores. We are starting with five stores now where we will be retailing my prêt collections, which will also be available at other multi-brand outlets. We will be showcasing menswear, womenswear and accessories...the whole shebang, priced between ₹5,000 and ₹18,000. Besides all of these, I am very excited about a project that has just started where we will be launching lounges and bars under the name of Gudda Bar—a fun take on the Buddha-Bar! We will be starting with outlets in Mumbai and Delhi. I am also writing two books—one is with Penguin



about the evolution of fashion through my eyes, and there's a coffee-table book with Om Books about my work in the last 25 years. A TV show, which I am not allowed to talk about at present, is also in the pipeline.

Is there any recurring theme or leitmotif in your works?

Yes. All my designs have the lotus and the peacock in some form. The lotus is from Kashmir and I grew up among them...it's a truly magnificent form. The reason I love the peacock is simple: there is no bird more beautiful.

You grew up in Kashmir. How does it influence your work?

I was in Kashmir till I was about 17 years old. I left the valley because I wanted to do the rest of my schooling and university in Delhi. My family was still there at that time. They left in 1989 when the trouble started. My childhood in Kashmir influences my work even now. My new collection has got a lot of Kashmir in it; in fact, all my collections have a lot of Kashmir in them. I've done a lot of work with embroidery typical of the region, called *suzani*, and the chain stitch.

I am trying to weave carpets and work with papier mache. I don't think I can give all the credit to myself for having revived any Kashmiri craft, but I have contributed to its existence. **1**

permanent resident
of the 60s

backyard
environmentalist

nobody's
fool

every little niece's
favorite aunt

For all the women you are
FEMINA

THE CV

Husband and wife duo Pankaj and Nidhi Ahuja started their eponymous label in 2006. Both graduates of NIFT, they met on the job—Pankaj was at Rohit Bal while Nidhi worked at an export firm. The couple have earned fame for their ability to experiment with weaves and embroideries on directional, contemporary silhouettes.



NEW COLLAB

The line for Koovs was Pankaj & Nidhi's first foray into the e-commerce space, an opportunity that they leapt at. "It's targeted at a younger, tech-savvier, trendier set. They are actually helping with the democratisation of fashion," says Pankaj. "Collaborations like these are changing the industry landscape; it's the only way to bring in a kind of newness to fashion."

Print PARADE

Pocket-friendly prices and the designers' signature pattern-heavy style; we've already bookmarked our calendar for the launch of Pankaj and Nidhi Ahuja's newest collaboration. By **Butool Jamal**

ART-INSPIRED

Talking about one of their inspirations for the Koovs line, Pankaj reveals, "We pictured Portuguese tiles and ceramics. It's this blue-and-white pottery that's very beautiful, but we were thinking more of a tea party that went a bit wild."



Design code

Over the last few seasons, the duo has increasingly focussed on the possibilities of graphic prints, while still highlighting traditional crafts. Take for example their spring/summer 2015 line, which featured images of clocks and charms from a box of trinkets. Pankaj says, "Our initial few years were very much about designing by hand till we came upon the print idea. Prints are like a painting. It makes us cost-effective but you still have embroidery and you can play with dyes and colours."





Prints

They created five different print stories for the collaboration—two with jewels, two with ceramic plates and one with motifs from playing cards. “The common strain is the broken element; the shattered plates, the fragments of gems. Normally we are organised and symmetrical, so we wanted to do something different. It was all about breaking and reassembling.”

NEW SEASON

For fall/winter 2015, the duo delved into the mineral world. Delicate embroidery and mirror-work recreated the shine and shimmer of gems, while a print of magnified rubies covered everything from cocktail gowns to a trouser suit set. A baroque floral pattern in shades of ochre, silver and navy brought us up and out from the depths of the earth.

Celeb spotting

From red carpet veterans like Priyanka Chopra and Deepika Padukone to fresh-faced young stars like Alia Bhatt and Shraddha Kapoor, everyone's got Pankaj & Nidhi on speed dial.



SILHOUETTES

For Koovs, the designers say their shapes are, “a little younger, slightly sexier too, perhaps.” That translates to fitted dresses, jumpsuits, fit and flare skirts, and maxi dresses. “There's an ease to everything. It's to the point, not overly fussy or complicated.”

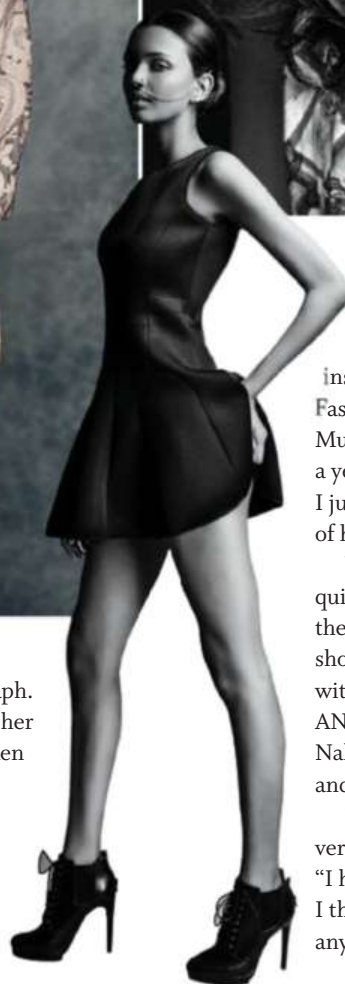
DESTINY'S CHILD

Fate may have intervened in her choice of career, but model Monica Tomas is clearly steering her own course on the ramp, finds
Suchita Parikh-Mundul

(Clockwise from left) Monica features in *Femina* as one of India's next top models; Working the camera; Striking a pose



Monica Tomas's ebullience is palpable even in a photograph. Although modelling wasn't her first career choice, she's taken to it like a fish to water. "A friend urged me to participate in *Femina* Style Diva last year—so I did, for no particular reason, and it was a good experience," smiles Monica, who was the first runner-up.



Having originally moved from Ooty to Mumbai to pursue fashion designing, Monica found herself meeting talent agency Anima Creative Management instead. "I went to the Pearl Academy of Fashion right after school and moved to Mumbai to pursue designing professionally, a year-and-a-half ago. It was slim pickings and I just wanted to keep myself occupied," she says of her decision to get into modelling.

With her easy-going personality, Monica has quickly risen in the modelling ranks to become the face of several ad campaigns, editorial shoots and design houses. "Monica's worked with us on our Global Desi campaign," says AND Designs India Ltd's lead stylist, Delna Nallaseth. "She's a beautiful girl, full of energy and an absolute pleasure to work with."

The up-and-comer's portfolio showcases her versatility and ease in front of the camera. "I have always enjoyed myself at work and I think it shows. I'm always thrilled to try anything new," she smiles. "It may all have ➤

been unplanned, but I take work seriously.”

Gunita Strobe, director and co-founder of Anima Creative Management, the firm that manages the model, says, “Monica’s constantly improving her modelling skills, and adheres to a strict gym regimen to maintain her body.”

Her burgeoning portfolio is proof of her dedication. She’s worked on editorial shoots (including a handful for *Femina*), has modelled for Lenovo, L’Oréal, Bodice, Manish Arora, Gavin C Miguel, Anamika Khanna, Rocky S, Abu Jani, Gaurang Shah and Masaba Gupta. And she’s up for TV and even films, if opportunity should come a-knocking.

There are exciting possibilities ahead for Monica and it can even be argued that the model hasn’t strayed far from her original plans. Rather than be a designer herself, Monica has become the muse; one who has not entirely abandoned her passion. “I keep track of fashion and the latest trends and prefer clean, boxy silhouettes for dailywear. My staples are a jacket and trousers. For occasions, nothing beats saris—they make you look so good!” Not that she needs help.

(From left)
A close-up of Monica; Getting into the groove for a *Femina* workwear feature; Modelling an outfit for the fashion feature



“FOR OCCASIONS, NOTHING BEATS SARIS—THEY MAKE YOU LOOK SO GOOD!”



Firm favourites

Icons: “Rajmata Gayatri Devi for her grace and style and Brigitte Bardot for her timeless classic look.”

Models: “Lakshmi Menon, Binx Walton and Natalie Westling, because they are unconventional supermodels who have been changing the face of fashion.”

Shoot destination: “Jaipur. It’s so vibrant and has such rich culture, architecture and heritage. I definitely want to explore the place more.”

Food: “I enjoy Chinese and Italian. When I first moved to Mumbai, I began to crave a good, home-cooked south Indian meal, so I learnt how to cook it.”

Sport: “I often swim to take a break from my regular workout.”

Hobby: “Painting is fun and relaxing.”

Books: “Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, F Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and Damned* and Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*.” 

The sleeveless jacket

Layer it over a sheer shirt and classic loafers for a boyish, relaxed air.

Organza shirt, ₹9,800, **Pankaj & Nidhi**; Woollen culottes, ₹5,100, **Not So Serious by Pallavi Mohan**; Silk sleeveless jacket, ₹16,000, **Quirkbox**; Leather loafers, ₹5,299, **Charles & Keith**

PAINTED ON

Tailoring is seeing a resurgence, and this time around, it's all about colours that are paintbox-bright. Young, sexy Rhea Chakraborty tries on all that's juicy this fall

The blazer

A wear-with-everything jacket never goes off our style radar.

Cotton poplin shirt dress, ₹9,950, **Rajesh Pratap Singh**; Polyester blazer, ₹3,990, **Zara**; Pearl and metal earrings, ₹5,880, **Isharya** >





The maxi dress

The easy-breezy maxi gets some structure with a stiff collar and buttons down the middle.

Scuba maxi dress, ₹25,200, **Masaba**; Faux leather loafer wedges, ₹2,995, **Qupid @ Koovs.com**; Leather and metal watch, ₹2,000, **Forever New**; Stacked rings, ₹5,280, **Isharya**; Triangle metal cuff, ₹1,265, metal cuff, ₹1,265, both **ShopLune.com**

The high-waist skirt

Wear yours with a high-neck blouse and layers of neckpieces for some retro charm.

Cotton turtleneck blouse, ₹595, **Koovs.com**; Polyester skirt, ₹2,999, **Marks & Spencer**; Metal choker, ₹1,500, metal choker necklace, ₹1,350, both **ShopLune.com**; Metal and enamel ring, ₹4,100, **Isharya** ▶



The pantsuit

Mellow out any harsh lines with edgy platform loafers and a colourful clutch.

Silk blazer and trouser set, ₹20,000, **The Circus**; Faux leather loafer wedges, ₹2,995, **Qupid** @ **Koovs.com**; Crystal cuff, ₹9,480, **Isharya**; Canvas clutch, ₹7,650, **Anusha Lalwani** @ **Minerali** >





The tailored trouser

Wear them tapered and cut just above the ankle. Tease with a hint of skin.

Cotton bodysuit, ₹795, **Koovs.com**; Cotton trousers, ₹2,199, **Marks & Spencer**; Patchwork beaded jacket, price on request, **Nachiket Barve**; Leather wedges, ₹5,499, **Charles & Keith**; Pyramid mirror cuff, ₹7,080, enamel cuff, ₹4,080, silver mirror cuff, ₹4,080, all **Isharya** 

I work at a corporate firm and I would love to add variety to my wardrobe of pantsuits. I'd like to wear something that's stylish, yet subtle. What formal wear would you recommend for a pear-shaped body?

—Aneesha Malhotra, Pune

Something fitted and flared would be ideal for you. You could pair a bow-tie blouse with a fitted pencil skirt. Another option is to pair the blouse with a fitted panelled skirt that has a flared bottom. If you're more comfortable in trousers, you could wear a pair with a crêpe-silk, cowl-neck blouse. Or go for cropped trousers with a straight-fit tunic.

DEEPIKA GOVIND

Renowned Bangalore-based fashion designer, also an associate member of the Fashion Design Council of India



I love metallics. I know they may not be trending at the moment and that they often make an outfit loud, but they are my weakness. Could you suggest fashion tricks I can use to ensure I don't look like a disco ball when I wear them?

—Monaz Lakdawala, Bangalore

When you play with metallics, the simple rule of thumb is to tone down the rest of the outfit. Pick your choice of blingy garment and couple it with sombre tones.

Wearing neutrals with your metallic pieces is the trick to keep from blinding onlookers. Let that gold skirt or silver blouse do all the talking!


MASABA GUPTA

Mumbai-based fashion designer who sells under her label Masaba



I'm looking to invest in fine jewellery and am confused about what the best option is. I'm not fond of yellow gold so I'm not considering it. What do you think is the better bet between platinum and white gold? I just can't decide.

—Jamira Khan, Baroda

Repairing, redoing or redesigning platinum is more expensive as compared to white gold. This is due to the fact that platinum is a harder metal to work with. However, if that is not a concern for you, platinum jewellery is a good investment because the purity is higher and it won't wear down in time like white gold may. White gold is a mix of gold with other white metals so the purity is not as high. 

SUHANI PITTIE

Hyderabad-based jewellery designer who graduated from the Gemological Institute of America in Carlsbad, US



STYLE REHAB

Three fashion experts answer your style queries

Send in your queries to femina@wmm.co.in

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER

Did you know many Indian women prefer to wear a diamond nose pin? Forevermark is on this trend. Capricci, the Nose Pin Collection, includes a diamond nose pin, ear studs and a charm bracelet. The pin even comes with interchangeable jackets in delicate shapes like a heart or a flower.

AVAILABLE AT: **Authorised Forevermark retailers**
PRICE: **On request**



MOVING IN

We love it when local names go international. This time around, it's jewellery house Nirav Modi that's set up shop in New York's swanky Madison Avenue. A first for an Indian jeweller, the 700 sq ft boutique will be the new neighbour to a host of luxury brands, from Prada to Tom Ford.



BOLD SHOULDER

For fall/winter 2015, Christian Louboutin has two new bags for us to lust after. First up is the bohemian, Lucky L bucket bag in leather or suede with studs and fringing. The second is the adorable Sweet Charity, a mini backpack with Swarovski-embellished chain straps that make it perfect for a night out. Now, how do you choose just one?

AVAILABLE AT: **Christian Louboutin**
PRICE: **On request**



Trending

Femina's round up of the latest news, views and buzz in fashion



LAUNCH WE LOVE

Many a famous *derrière* has been photographed in a Juicy Couture velour tracksuit. Whether on Jennifer Lopez or Shilpa Shetty Kundra, the logo calls casual luxury to mind. Now they are setting up shop in India with the first store in Gurgaon. Apart from tracksuits, look out for some luxe outerwear as well as mod skirt suits, plenty of denim, ready-to-wear and accessories.

AVAILABLE AT: **Juicycouture.com**
PRICE: **₹2,000 onwards**

PAGE TURNER

Fashion India, by Phyllida Jay, is the perfect read for fashion lovers. The author explores topics like the relationship between Indian and western fashion, and how traditional fashion has become a springboard for reinterpreted and deconstructed designs. All supported by interviews with established as well as upcoming Indian designers.

AVAILABLE AT: **Leading bookstores**
PRICE: **₹1,995**



DRESS CODE

Field job and fashion don't marry well. Or so we thought. TV news anchor Sunetra Choudhury and AM:PM design duo Ankur and Priyanka Modi create a wardrobe made in heaven for the Indian woman at work. By **Surabhi Chauhan**
Photographs: **Abhishek Khandelwal**



Chanderi tunic, ₹10,200, Cotton culottes, ₹3,500, both **AM:PM by Ankur & Priyanka Modi**; Leather block-heel pumps, ₹6,499, **Clarks**; Ring, model's own



Georgette tunic, ₹11,800,
AM:PM by Ankur & Priyanka
Modi; Leather brogues, ₹7,999,
Clarks; Metal watch, ₹7,795,
DKNY; Rings, model's own

"WE CHOOSE FABRICS THAT ARE CLASSIC AND EASY TO CARRY, KEEPING THE INDIAN WEATHER IN MIND. CHANDERI, GEORGETTE AND CHIFFON ARE ALL VERY SUITABLE FOR OUR SUMMERS."

Priyanka Modi >

Chanderi tunic and jacket set,
₹16,800, **AM:PM by Ankur
& Priyanka Modi**; Leather
booties, ₹7,499, **Clarks**; Metal
cuff, ₹10,750, **Eina Ahluwalia**
at Nimai; Neckpiece and watch,
model's own

"YOU NEED
TO RELATE
TO THE
CLOTHES
YOU ARE MAKING."
Priyanka Modi




“YOU SHOULDN’T LET PEOPLE
GET DISTRACTED, BUT YOU
CAN’T LOSE YOURSELF,
EITHER. I’VE BEEN WEARING
LIPSTICK SINCE I WAS 15.”

Sunetra Choudhury >



Chanderi tunic, ₹9,800, Georgette
dhoti trousers, ₹7,800, both **AM:PM**
by **Ankur & Priyanka Modi**;
Leather booties, ₹7,499, **Clarks**;
Metal neckpiece, ₹4,558, **Lai**
at **Nimai**; Metal watch, ₹8,795,
Skagen; Ring, model's own

A woman with dark, wavy hair is standing outdoors on a wooden deck next to a swimming pool. She is wearing a beige traditional Indian outfit consisting of a long tunic with a draped front and a matching shawl. The neckline and cuffs of the tunic are adorned with intricate gold embroidery. She has her left hand on her hip and is looking off to the side. In the background, there is a swimming pool with a blue surface, some outdoor furniture, and lush greenery.

**“WHEN I SHOP
NOW, I ALWAYS
CONSIDER
WHAT WOULD
LOOK GOOD ON
TELEVISION.
I GUESS IF YOU
ENJOY WHAT YOU
DO, YOU RELATE
EVERYTHING TO IT.”**

Sunetra Choudhury >

Georgette tunic, ₹18,800, **AM:PM** by
Ankur & Priyanka Modi; Metal watch,
₹8,795, **Skagen**; Rings, model's own

Chanderi tunic, ₹10,800, **AM:PM**
by Ankur & Priyanka Modi;
Leather sandals, ₹6,499, **Clarks**;
Gold-plated brass earrings,
₹13,800, **Eina Ahluwalia** at
Nimai; Metal watch, ₹8,795,
Skagen; Rings, model's own

“I

would never wear this to work!” exclaims Sunetra Choudhury, eyeing the striking 100 mm round-toe Christian Louboutin pumps. A leading reporter and journalist with NDTV, Sunetra has a no-nonsense attitude to daily style. This makes her the ideal candidate for our feature, which aims to break down clichés and democratise fashion.

To do justice to Sunetra's wishlist for the workplace, we roped in Indian design duo Ankur and Priyanka Modi. Their label AM:PM is worn by women who need ease as well as structure as they go about their day. “She's just somebody who's very comfortable in her skin,” says Priyanka about the kind of person they design for. “And, of course, we address the needs of professionals who need something more sophisticated for the office.”

The creative head of AM:PM believes clothing should not just be about style, but also comfort. She says, “We choose fabrics that are classic and easy to carry, keeping the >

“WE ADDRESS THE NEEDS
OF PROFESSIONALS
WHO NEED
SOMETHING MORE
SOPHISTICATED
FOR THE OFFICE.”

Priyanka Modi

Indian weather in mind. Chanderi, georgette and chiffon are all very suitable for our summers. They are durable, can be easily washed and ironed, are travel-friendly and have a natural sort of appeal.”

A young mother, Priyanka arrives at the shoot in a simple, elegant black shift dress that will work for the studio meeting she'll be dashing off to next. Her partner Ankur, who manages the finances, admits, “You know, our clothes speak more about her (Priyanka's) personality. You need to relate to the clothes you are making.” Priyanka says, “It's not just me. It's about women of all ages. Every season, we study how women are evolving from season to season. A simple kurta or tunic isn't enough as workwear anymore.

“IT'S IMPORTANT FOR ME THAT PEOPLE ARE NOT DISTRACTED BY MY APPEARANCE AND REMAIN FOCUSED ON WHAT I'M REPORTING.”

Sunetra Choudhury

A wrap shirt over a pair of classic palazzos might be more appealing, plus they are not attached to the dupatta anymore. The idea is to work within the aesthetic space that they're comfortable with.”

The duo recommends investing in a variety of separates rather than entire outfits. Their contemporary version of the dhoti pants, worn with a jacket or shirt is something Sunetra also deems appropriate

for work. Both Priyanka and Sunetra agree that the three-piece suit, the international norm for news anchors, isn't ideal for our tropical climate. Sunetra, who has travelled across India for reportage, has a list of dos and don'ts for her wardrobe that she's learned the hard way. “I was in Banaras recently and it was terribly hot. A lot of people told me I looked wiped out. You don't want people

to say that. It's important to me that people are not distracted by my appearance and remain focused on what I'm reporting.”

While NDTV doesn't have a wardrobe department and wants their anchors and reporters to dress in what works for them, certain boundaries do exist. “When I shop now, I always consider what would look good on television. I guess if you

enjoy what you do, you relate everything to it,” says Sunetra.

This is the paradigm shift many women experience with their shopping habits when they start working. The way you shop reflects your personality and style, but the requirements of a workplace may curb those choices to a safer bet. Most offices do not have a specific dress code for women, however, ➤



Chanderi wrap top, ₹7,800, Georgette dhoti trousers, ₹7,800, both **AM:PM by Ankur & Priyanka Modi**; Leather sandals, ₹6,499, **Clarks**; Earrings, watch and ring, all model's own



From top: Priyanka and Sunetra discuss an outfit; the team caught off camera; Sunetra takes a look at the shots; makeup artist Sonam puts the final touches; the designers Ankur and Priyanka Modi; a close-up of Sunetra getting camera-ready



“AS LONG AS YOUR EDITORS ARE HAPPY AND YOU’RE DOING THE BEST YOU CAN, IT’S OKAY.”

Sunetra Choudhury

demure, tailored formals are appreciated. While ‘appropriate’ workwear does not prescribe any rules, minimalism is encouraged.

But while that’s true, the modern Indian woman also does not want to be confined to rules of dressing that have nothing to do with her performance at work. A big factor, however, is comfort, which Sunetra agrees can affect her work and how her audience responds to the news she is delivering. “The key on television, I think, is not to pay too much attention to the stuff you hear. As long as your editors are happy and you’re doing the

best you can, it’s okay,” says Sunetra.

But as a woman reporter, Sunetra has often been faced with inappropriate comments on the job. For instance, at a police headquarters, she was told that people are not used to women with lipstick. However, this doesn’t faze her. “I know that I said you shouldn’t let people get distracted, but you can’t lose yourself, either. I’ve been wearing lipstick since I was 15.” When she travelled across India for two months prior to the general elections in May 2009, which Sunetra documented in her book, *Braking News*, she chose to wear what the locals in villages wore. And this was not just to make her interviewees comfortable around her. “It was also because that was the most comfortable option.”

Her experience as a reporter has perhaps allowed her to not take what she wears too seriously. When we entered the Jantar Mantar protest area for the photoshoot, the team was struggling to navigate their way through the OROP protest, but not Sunetra. Dressed in her AM:PM smokey blue tunic, Sunetra walked through the crowd with ease, unfazed and focused, just as she does on camera. **F**



Body. conscious

WHETHER IT'S FIXATING ON BUTT CRACKS, NIPPLES OR THE PEEK-A-BOO PENIS, FASHION'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HUMAN BODY HAS ENTERED MANY NO-GO ZONES OVER THE YEARS. BY GEETA RAO

in 2014, Rihanna wore 2,16,000 Swarovski crystals and bare nipples to the CFDA Fashion Awards held in New York. Spring/summer 2015 in London and Paris was all about freeing the nipple too, as shows at Christopher Kane, Burberry and Tom Ford went sheer and clear, inspiring the quip, 'Bra-less is the new black'. The 'Free the Nipple' campaign that trended on social media began as a feminist protest against a gender-biased law applicable in 33 of the 52 states in the USA. The law allows men to go topless but bans women from doing the same and, strangely, also forbids breastfeeding in public.

Scout Willis (daughter of actors Bruce Willis and Demi Moore), Madonna, Miley Cyrus and Cara Delevingne have all lent their voices—and nipples—to the campaign. Faced with censorship by Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, pictures with the hashtag #freethenipple have been defiantly and repeatedly reposted. But the nipple is just a small part of a bigger story. Over the years, the female body has been deconstructed for political statements, reclaimed by feminists,

hijacked by the porn industry, flaunted by the media and censored by the moral police.

Sexy for a season

Even the fashion industry has played a role in this appropriation. Every season, a new body part takes centre stage on the runway. We have witnessed the butt crack, the return of the décolletage and the discovery of the back cleavage, and survived them all.

Female bodies nearly stripped bare of >

“There is nothing vulgar about the human body. Vulgarities lie in the eyes that deem it so. We design what we find beautiful and our idea of beauty isn't to cage and punish women and men. It is to liberate them, unleash their personal brand of beauty, and showcase it to perfection via our couture.”

ABU JANI AND SANDEEP KHOSLA



Bejewelled silk
ruffled gown, price on
request. **Abu Jani
& Sandeep Khosla**



Organza drape with
feather embellishment,
price on request, **Falguni
& Shane Peacock**

sensationalism, the gaze has shifted to the male. Last year, designer Rick Owens had his male models walk the ramp wearing no underwear and sack-like robes with holes cut into the crotches so it looked like a parade of penises swinging in and out of view. While this is on the outer edge of what's socially acceptable—the very tip, you might say—other parts that were once shrouded in mystery have become almost banal through frequent exposure. Like the midriff, which has ridden the waves of popularity, coupled with low-rise jeans, for over a decade now.

Exposure doesn't just fetishise the body, it can nudge greater acceptance of a diverse range of bodies too. Big butts have always been celebrated as a sign of fertility in India and Africa, but the worship of androgyny and slim silhouettes on the international catwalk excluded huge swathes of women from these parts of the world. The generous posterior was rebranded as sexy in the west when Kim Kardashian and Jennifer Lopez came along. Kim's rear is reportedly insured at \$21 million today.

Vintage taboos

Travelling back in time to Victorian England, it was a flash of the ankle that was considered risqué. Even the tiniest peek of it was considered titillating, so much so that in more prudish homes, furniture legs were covered up so no immoral thoughts could cross young men's minds. Approximately 60 years later, the pendulum swung to the other extreme. The miniskirt, a quintessentially British invention, became all the rage.

Jane Austen's Regency Period, which came even before the Victorian Age, found bosoms perfectly acceptable, with bustles being added to skirts to make hips look fuller. Moving back further, panniers and hip pads for men and women were essential court gear during the time of Marie Antoinette. Cleavage became so prominent during this time that cartoons appeared, lampooning ladies of high society who were depicted having nipple-baring fashion faux pas. Turns out the nip-slip isn't exactly a 21st century phenomenon.

“Through our designs, we are depicting the freedom to express empowerment and liberation. Confidence is key and the ideal Peacock woman is someone who is comfortable with her body and not afraid to speak her mind.”

FALGUNI & SHANE PEACOCK

Indian fashion has seen the *uttariya* and *antariya*—upper cloth and lower garment—as the precursors to the sari and dhoti. There seems to have been no social taboo about men and women being similarly dressed. The midriff has always been exposed in India, much before belly-button piercing and cropped tops became cool. “The midriff was taboo in the west until Madonna,” say designers Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla, “But our saris and lehengas have always showcased it. When the sari was invented, there was neither blouse nor petticoat, both of which were introduced by the Portuguese.”

Double standards

Most ancient Indian sculptures depict women with exposed breasts, so it is ironic to note that Lakmé Fashion Week in 2006 had the moral police gasping at a runway stumble, leading to what was coyly referred to as a ‘wardrobe malfunction’ involving a bustier coming off and revealing the nipple.


Throughout the ages, in India and around the world, it has been external standards—culture, context and society—that have dictated the parameters of what is considered appropriate and what is not. Designer JJ Valaya has said, “Whether someone is comfortable or not in any form of exposure should be a matter of personal preference.” This rings true especially in the fight to ‘Free the Nipple’. Therefore, the point of the campaign goes deeper than just the right to bare breasts. It's about our right to decide for ourselves rather than have society impose its views on us. After all, one size does not fit all. ➤

“We need to enjoy both, our bodies as nature willed them, as well as the potential of how stunning they look with clothes on!”

JJ VALAYA



Bejewelled
headgear, price on
request. JJ Valaya



“A silhouette can affect the energy around the body. Our idea is to bring it to life, through romantic silhouettes and drapes that accentuate each curve and highlight femininity.”

SHANTANU & NIKHIL >

Leather and silk
fishtail gown,
price on request.
Shantanu & Nikhil



Woollen fringed cape, price on request, **Sabyasachi Mukherjee**; Sheer stockings, stylist's own

“We try to pay homage to both body and mind, so even when we do body-conscious silhouettes, they are layered with handicrafts to keep the mind curious.”

SABYASACHI MUKHERJEE >

godmother of
abandoned pets

champion
of powerpoint

wizard of odd

many times
bitten,
never shy.

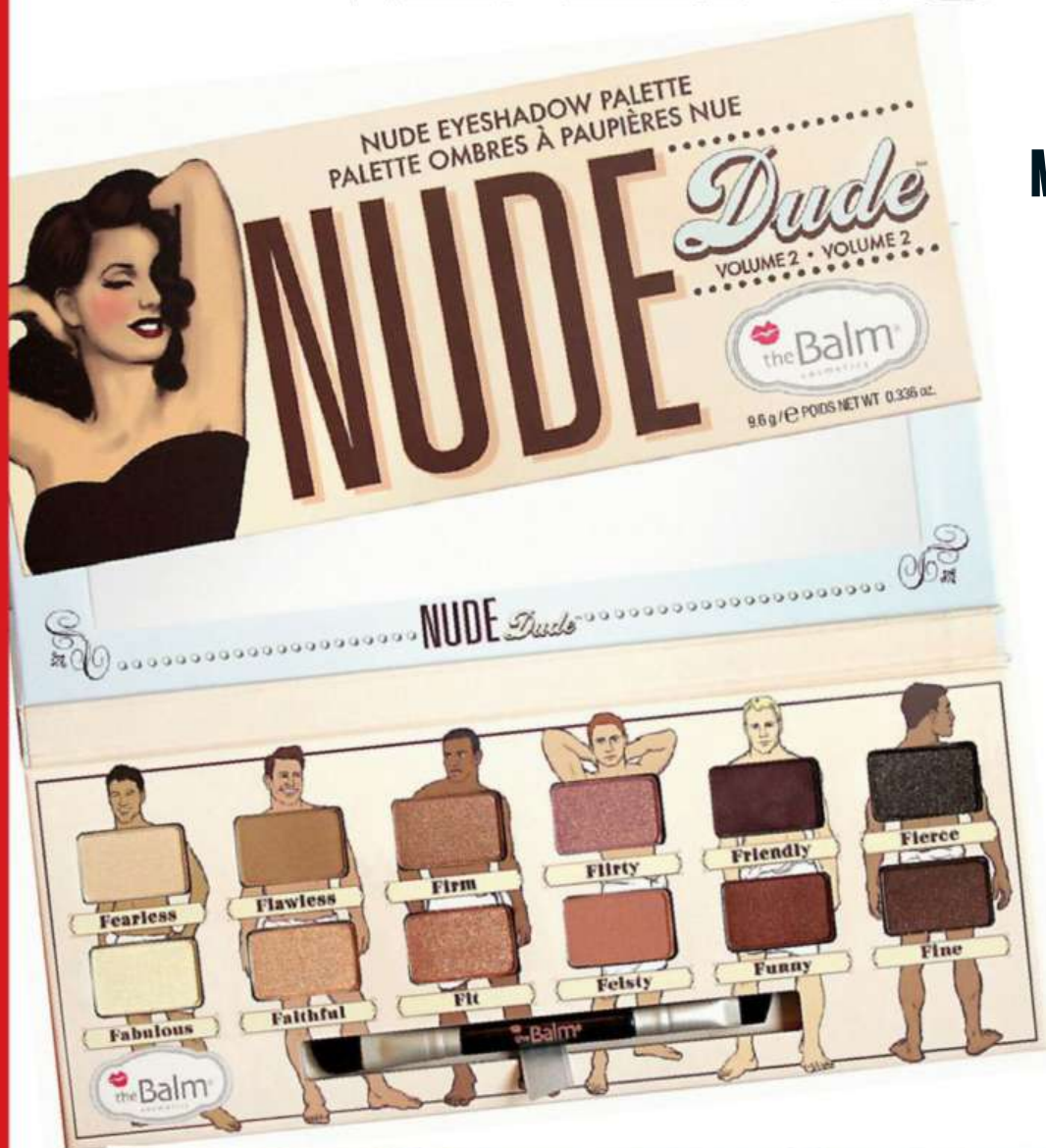


For all the women you are
FEMINA

“My designs celebrate the human form the way it is and exhibit and enhance the natural shape and beauty of the human figure. My collections showcase every sensual curve of a woman’s body by the use of side slits, split backs and plunging necklines.”

MANAV GANGWANI

Silk and sheer gown with tassels, price on request, Manav Gangwani



YOU SELFISH, MAN FLAWLESS

Harking back to caveman attitudes, The Balm's Nude 'Tude eyeshadow is gaining flak for being sexist. How can an eyeshadow palette be sexist, you may ask. Here's why—The Nude 'Tude palette features illustrations of naked women, their privates covered with eyeshadows that have names like Selfish, Stubborn and Snobby. On the other hand, the Nude Dude palette, which has illustrations of naked men, has positive titles like Flawless, Faithful and Fit. Critics feel, and rightly, that a makeup brand should empower and enhance, not bring anyone down.



REVERSE SMOKY EYES FOR A MUSIC FESTIVAL

Rock, EDM or techno—whatever your gig of choice, you'll stand out from the crowd with reverse smoky eyes. Makeup artist Richard Wilkinson shows **Samreen Samad** how to get this look





1 After creating a clean base with moisturiser and foundation, pick a liquid concealer two shades lighter than your skin tone and apply it under your eyes. This will instantly brighten your face and make you look fresh.



2 Blend the concealer with a brush or your ring finger. Set it by dusting some loose powder with a dome brush.



3 Swipe rose gold eyeshadow on the crease of your eyelids.



4 With a spoolie brush tame your eyebrows into a perfect shape.



5 To get heavily kohled eyes, draw a thick line in black on your lower waterline. Extend it outwards to create a wing. Using a concealer brush, smudge the kohl for a smoky effect.

FOR A FUN DAY LOOK, USE COLOURED MASCARA IN GREEN OR PURPLE. **MAKE SURE YOU KEEP YOUR OTHER FEATURES UNDERSTATED.**



6 To make the look more dramatic, apply gold eyeliner on the crease of your eyelids in random strokes.



7 Swipe a few coats of black volumising mascara.




8 To ensure your features are not competing with each other, keep your base simple with a hint of bronzer for natural glow.



9 Finish with a nude lip gloss.



10 Tong your hair and leave it open for that rockstar vibe. 

PHOTOGRAPHS: VINAY JAVKAR; MAKEUP AND HAIR: RICHARD WILKINSON (TOABH MODEL MANAGEMENT); MODEL: SASHA MERCHANT (TOABH MODEL MANAGEMENT); FASHION ASSISTANT: SUJALA NEWAR; FASHION INTERN: SHRAYSI DANG; STRIPED SCUBA CROP TOP: ₹990, EARRINGS: ₹3,300, AE-TEE: RUFFLED GEORGETTE TOP: ₹2,890, ZARA



SEXIST *by* design

We're slowly realising that sexism is so ingrained in our very thoughts, that we need all of our reserves to fight it.

But thoughts turn into actions turn into things, so it's not just a chauvinistic boss; you're dealing with an insensitive cubicle, car and washroom too. **Akhila Vijaykumar** scans our immediate environment to see where sexism can lurk

I've been working for almost a decade, and at every single workplace, I've always had a selection of warm jackets, shawls, and sweaters because the air conditioning always seemed set to 'cryogenic' instead of 'comfortably cool'. Of course, the woollens come in handy to cover up the redness from where my seatbelt had attacked my collarbone. The scarves also acted as playthings while I waited in interminable lines at the ladies' loos. But then I realised, it wasn't me, it was sexist design.

LOO-SING OUR PATIENCE

"Why, oh why, are loos for women always so few?" asks Oindrila De, 29. "Every time I go to the ladies', there's always a long queue and very few stalls." How are loos sexist, you might ask. Women need to sit down to use the toilet, they

take longer, our clothes are more restrictive (a 20-minute discussion on why women need zips is not enclosed here), and pregnant or menstruating women take even longer. The space for toilets is seemingly evenly divided, and the men's room has many more urinals. Even in the US, where legislation has addressed the design and provision of public restrooms by necessitating more space for women's rooms, there is no parity.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Make a noise. Graffiti the walls and demand more toilets. We are kidding about the walls; you

should graffiti even the mirrors. No, we're kidding again. In all seriousness, there isn't much you can do except go to a toilet on a higher floor—often the floors in between the shopping and food court areas tend to have lesser traffic. But creating online petitions, making a noise on social media, approaching the manager of the mall in a group—these are things you can do to at least bring attention to this issue.

FIGHT THE FREEZE

An ex-colleague called me in August this year. "Did you SEE the newspaper today? It's not us! It's the bloody ACs! They were devised for men!" At 6 am, this sentence made no sense. Much coffee later, I too was outraged. A study published by Boris Kingma and Wouter van Marken Lichtenbelt on Nature.com, dealing with energy consumption in offices and global warming, had a very interesting finding: temperatures for air conditioning in most office buildings were based on a 1960s formula, calculated on the basis of the resting metabolic rate for a 40-year-old man, weighing around around 70 kg. Holy icicles, Batman. So, times have changed, women have definitely changed, men are trying to change and yet, air conditioners haven't?

Also, cubicle desks: Who decided the height of all desks? Why aren't these adjustable?

Temperatures for air conditioning in offices were based on a 1960s formula, for a 40-year-old man, weighing around 70 kg.



Hair-ripping iPhone

The iPhone 6 could be said to be sexist with a vengeance—it rips out long hair, strand by strand. The hashtag #HairGate trended for quite a while last year, with women (and bearded men), not just suffering from losing hair to the seam near the camera, but also facing ridicule for talking about something that was a genuine design flaw, simply because it was seen as frivolous.

Huge smartphones

Prajakta Patil has a problem with phones that don't fit in her hands. "I can't take a selfie with one hand. Why aren't we making phones that fit in a woman's hand?" With 5 inches being the norm, it seems like these are only going to get bigger—don't ask us why.

Again, we suspect that this is the handiwork of some bright spark from the 1950s.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Speak or write to office admin (as a group would be better) and point out that this is gender-discrimination

bias in thermal comfort—not our words, it's in the study. Ask your admin to set temperatures at slightly warmer levels, a move that also helps combat global warming and rising energy bills. You could also propose that people who want higher temperatures (not just men, even women with high metabolic rates) be given small table fans, or be allowed to take off suits or jackets indoors. ▶



The current three-point seatbelt was designed in the 1950s and might be uncomfortable for both sexes, but can actually be deadly for women.

FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS

When Archana Girish, 33, started driving she was thrilled. But there was one nagging problem: her seatbelt. “It was a constant annoyance. It kept hurting my collarbone, and given that I’m rather well-endowed, no bragging, I found it extremely painful as it would end up squashing either side of my chest.” Neha Sharma, 27, adds, “It’s not just the chest. If you adjust the clip, it still doesn’t work, because then I have a collarbone chafing issue.”

The current three-point seatbelt was designed in the 1950s and might be uncomfortable for both sexes, but can actually be deadly for women. A recent study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that women drivers were

Not just seatbelts

Seat heights and steering wheel adjustments in cars are other challenges that women face. Neha says, “A lot of my friends face issues while sitting in the driver’s seat, because unless you’re buying a luxury car, there is no way to adjust the height, so sometimes your view is partially obscured by the bonnet of the car.”

Heels

“Oh, let me invent something that will screw up women’s posture, feet and spine. We’ll say it’s mandatory for office or something and then convince them it’s hot,” —what we think went through the mind of the man who invented heels. In a preliminary study at Stanford University, it was found that women in heels walked awkwardly, straining their joints and perhaps increasing the risk of osteoarthritis, something women are already more prone to than men. High heels are said to have their origin in 9th century Persia for horseback warriors to keep their feet in the stirrups. How they became a must for women is beyond us.



47 per cent more likely to sustain injuries from car crashes—researchers Dipan Bose and Jeff Crandall of the University of Virginia, and Maria Segui-Gomez of Navarra University in Spain, found that the male-centric design of safety measures could be to blame.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The more uncomfortable you are wearing a seatbelt, the less securely you’ll fasten it. So invest in a seatbelt strap adjuster (you’ll find one on Amazon.com) or the S-clip, both of which let you customise the angle at which the belt rests. 

princess of
all things shoes

3 am pillow-talk
philosopher

secret santa
of office peons

fastest blogger
in the east

For all the women you are
FEMINA

BEAUTY documentary



There's the body we're born with, and the one we create, ideally through exercise. Or there's surgery, which cuts and trims away living flesh to fit mental ideals. **Samreen Samad** examines the 'no pain, no gain' world of beauty surgery

If you had to cut off a part of your body to be considered beautiful, which one would you choose? How far would you go to look 'perfect'? In the last few years, we've seen several examples of body dysmorphia, where sufferers undergo multiple surgeries in their quest to look good in their own eyes. Valeria Lukyanova had multiple surgeries to look like a human Barbie doll. Michael Jackson went through extensive cosmetic surgery to fix his nose, amongst other things. It led us to question: is it really that easy to get 'beautiful'?

Barbie or BARBARIC?

GOING UNDER THE KNIFE: THE HIDDEN DANGERS

Cosmetic surgery is a booming industry today. From actors to housewives, collegians and wannabe brides, there's a new wave of perfection-seekers. The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reported that up to 4 per cent women undergo cosmetic procedures in their 30s, and 30 per cent of women between the age of 19 and 34 opt for liposuction. Women of normal weight go under the knife to trim an inch of fat from their thighs or enhance their breasts, without knowing the gravity and potential risk of these surgeries. A study conducted by the University of Colorado found that liposuction may slim one problem area while creating another. Women who have suctioned fat from their thighs and lower abdomen, eventually put the weight back on. But it distributes unevenly—often to less flattering areas like the upper abdomen, back and arms. Dr Jaishree Sharad, dermatologist, warns that liposuction can cause lumps and infections. Furthermore, changing one feature may sometimes throw off the appearance of others. "Plastic surgeons have to be skilled and have the eye of a sculptor. There's a high chance of nose jobs, fat grafts and face lifts going wrong," with serious emotional and psychological disturbances to boot. Dr Harshna Bijlani, co-founder and medical head of Ageless Clinic, Mumbai, says several brides go through this trauma when the procedure is done close to their wedding date, and the results are undesirable.

MAKEUP MANTRA

Everybody wants to look beautiful; the multi-billion dollar cosmetics industry exists as proof of this. Makeup is the first and easiest step to looking attractive—from bronzers that create an illusion of chiselled facial structures and highlighters that enhance your best features to serums and creams touted as youth elixirs. While most reputed brands undergo thorough

tests for safety, there are things we overlook in the name of beauty that could have hazardous effects.

Celebrity makeup artist Kapil Bhalla warns us against cosmetics that contain parabens, lead, mercury and other harmful chemicals. Kapil says, "Certain ingredients in talcum powder and fragrances are closely related to cancer and respiratory problems." Hence, it is of utmost importance that you watch out for certain ingredients while buying a beauty product. Virginia Holmes, co-owner and co-founder of Fat Mu helps us identify some of the harmful ones:

● **TRICLOSAN:** Found in anti-bacterial products, hand sanitisers and deodorants, this ingredient is linked to cancer and endocrine disruption. ➤

If the shoe or dress doesn't fit...

While liposuction, breast enhancement and rhinoplasty are fairly safe when done under proper supervision, there are graver surgeries people undergo that even plastic surgeons don't approve of. For example, rib removal surgery is gaining popularity, with several celebrities opting for it to get smaller waists. If that's not extreme enough, stiletto surgery will leave you appalled. This surgery requires the removal of the littlest toe, so feet can fit into stilettos better!

Ukrainian model
Valeria Lukyanova
underwent several
surgeries to look like
a Barbie doll



**WOMEN WHO HAVE SUCTIONED FAT FROM
THEIR THIGHS AND LOWER ABDOMEN
EVENTUALLY PUT THE WEIGHT BACK ON.
BUT IT DISTRIBUTES UNEVENLY—OFTEN TO
LESS FLATTERING AREAS.**



OVER-FILLING, DURING A FILLER PROCEDURE, CAN MAKE YOUR FACE LOOK SWOLLEN AND YOUR LIPS UNNATURAL.

Forget beef, ban these beauty trends!

Just recently, our social media feeds were flooded with the latest rage, suntan tattoos—one of the most dangerous beauty trends. Creating art on your body by spending long hours in the sun without protection can increase the risk of melanoma by a staggering 80 per cent. Komal Gulati, makeup expert, Headstart International, warns us about skin bleaching too, saying, “Bleaching products contain mercury that can block the production of melanin and cause skin cancer.” Komal also cautions us about hair straightening procedures that involve the use of carcinogenic chemicals like formaldehyde. “This procedure is not only harmful for the client but also for the stylist doing the service,” adds Komal.

Botox done incorrectly can make your face expressionless and plastic



● **TOLUENE:** Often found in nail and hair products, this ingredient is known to disrupt the immune and endocrine system.

● **SODIUM LAURYL (ETHER) SULFATE (SLS, SLES):** A former industrial degreaser now used to make soap foam can irritate the skin by getting absorbed in it.

● **PARAPHENYLENEDIAMINE (PPD):**

Commonly used in hair products and dyes, this ingredient is toxic and can damage the immune system.

● **HYDROQUINONE:** This chemical is used to lighten skin. It has been banned in the UK and is rated as the most toxic ingredient in the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep Cosmetics database.

● **FORMALDEHYDE:** Found in nail products, hair straightening treatments, hair dyes, fake eyelash adhesives and shampoos, this ingredient is described as carcinogenic by the US National Toxicology Program.

● **PLACENTAL EXTRACT:** Used in some skin and hair products, it is linked to endocrine disruption.

QUICK FIX, LONG-TERM AGONY

“Honey, you know me, I don't really believe in marriage; now Botox on the other hand, that works every time,” said the sassy Samantha Jones in *Sex And The City*. We disagree. Botox, lasers, anti-tan treatments, and fillers don't work every time. Dr Sharad stresses that it takes knowledge, skill and proper equipment to make these procedures work for you. She says, “A lot of local salons offer such treatments but don't have trained technicians. Botox done incorrectly can make your face expressionless and plastic.” “Over-filling, during a filler procedure, can make your face look swollen and your lips unnatural,” adds Dr Bijlani. Intense Pulsed Light is an advanced procedure that evens out skin and treats discoloration like freckles and rosacea, but it comes with its own pitfalls. Since it targets pigments, it runs the risk of creating uneven results, especially on dark skin. Peels are another beauty fad these days. But over-peeling can make your skin thin and prone to sun damage, for which you will, in turn, need anti-tan treatments like laser resurfacing. Laser resurfacing minimises wrinkles, builds collages and repairs sun damage, but when improperly done, it can cause hyper- or hypopigmentation (dark and light spots) on Asian and dark skin tones. **f**

Whirl of CURLS


Corkscrew curls made a splash at Milan Fashion Week FW '16, thanks to the Blugirl show. **Joyoti Mahanta** shows you how to go into flashback mode



Braun Satin Hair 1 Hair Dryer

THE SIZE OF THE CURLS DEPENDS ON THE BARREL SIZE OF THE CURLING IRON. FOR UNIFORM PEAKS AND CURVES, USE A THIN CURLING IRON.

GET THE LOOK:

- 1 Wash your hair with a volumising shampoo and conditioner and towel dry. Comb and make a parting of your choice—middle, side or exaggerated side.
- 2 For added bounce, apply a dollop of curl-enhancing mousse to the lengths and then blow-dry your hair. Use your fingers to lift at the hairline while drying for added volume.
- 3 Comb your hair and then start to curl using a thin-rod curling iron. Wrap your hair around the curling iron lock by lock, twisting all curls to the back, until entire mane is curly. Do not brush after curling.
- 4 Style the fringe and secure on the side with bobby pins. For the undone, worn-in effect, slightly loosen curls with your fingertips. Apply hairspray and you're ready! 



The look
MESSY CURLS
Wear it at
A RETRO PARTY



BBLUNT High Definition Curl Curl-Defining Leave-In Cream

L'Occitane Volumizing Conditioner



L'Oréal Professionnel Volumetry



TIGI Bed Head Masterpiece Massive Shine Hairspray



BaByliss Curling Iron

If you are looking for a style that's exciting and glamorous, then think big, think volume. On the ramp at the Blugirl show, the models' hair was heavenly, a picture-perfect, luxe version of corkscrew curls—voluminous, cloud-like, messy. Teamed with beautiful red-maroon lips, bold brows and Twiggy-inspired lashes, this look makes accessories superfluous.

Ride the wave

Add a twist to the popular deep side parting—quite literally. By **Sayanti Banerjee**

Vintage hairdos are always high-glam and Kangana Ranaut knows just how to update them for this century. A refreshing change from her naturally curly hair, this hairstyle she wore for a red carpet event was a knockout.

**IF YOU LOVE THIS
HAIRDO AS MUCH AS WE
DO, TAKE NOTES...**

Volume is important, so begin by washing with a volumising shampoo and conditioner. Towel-dry and apply a root-lifting mousse on your scalp before you detangle the length. Finish with a volumising blast-dry. Make a subtle side parting to keep your final look soft and direct most of the volume towards one side of your forehead. Take thick sections of your hair from the sides and fasten them with velcro rollers on both sides of the parting. Turn them anticlockwise for structured out-curls. Apply a medium hold spray before you remove the rollers and then use a shine spray to set the do for the evening. You can bunch up the remaining hair from the nape of the neck to make a low chignon for a classy finish. **f**

**THOUGH THIS HAIRDO
LOOKS SIMPLE, THE
STRUCTURED FINISH NEEDS
TO BE SEAMLESS. MAKE SURE
YOU KEEP THE OVERALL
TEXTURE EVEN BY
VOLUMISING THE HAIR WELL
BEFORE YOU BEGIN.**

Kangana
Ranaut



PHOTOGRAPH: YOGEN SHAH

TIGI Bed Head
Hard Head
Hard Hold
Hairspray

Schwarzkopf
Professional
Bonacure
Volume Boost
Shampoo

L'Oréal Professionnel
Volumetry Conditioner

Toni&Guy
Glamour
Moisturising
Shine Spray

Kevin.Murphy
Anti.Gravity
Oil Free
Volumiser



Philips
KeraShine
Dryer



Sculpted to PERFECTION

If you want a sharp and chiselled look, remember: a little contouring can go a long way. **Sayanti Banerjee** gives you the lowdown



FACE

Cleanse your face well, tone and moisturise. Keep the base light with a tinted moisturiser instead of a heavy foundation to let the skin breathe. Also, use blotting tissues to cut down on shine or greasiness due to humidity. Get that healthy glow with translucent powder or a compact.



CHEEKS

Dab a coral or pink cream blush on the apple of your cheeks. Then, contour the hollow of your cheekbones using a cream-based bronzer and swipe it over the regions of the face that need highlighting (jaw line, hairline, sides of the nose and around the lips). You can also use a lighter bronzer on the lower half of the cheeks.



Sonakshi Sinha

Kim Kardashian swears by it and closer home, Sonakshi Sinha sets the perfect example. With the help of the right products and techniques, you too can accentuate your best features with contouring.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

ROUND FACE

You can define the jaw line with a bronzer two shades deeper than your skin tone to slim down the cheeks.

SQUARE FACE

Use two shades of foundation, one darker and one lighter than your skin tone, to sculpt your face. Apply the darker one on the bridge of your nose and the sides of your face, and a lighter shade on the rest.

HEART-SHAPED FACE

Since your face is broadest at the cheeks, winged eyeliner will act as a 'face-lift', literally. Opt for a bright pout and go easy on the blusher.



EYES

Apply a good concealer to cover up dark circles. Use nude eyeshadow on the upper lids and a beige highlighter under the brow bone. With a steady hand, swipe on a thick line of black eyeliner close to the upper lash line. Apply mascara to the upper and lower lashes. You can define the waterline with a light brown kajal to open up your eyes further. Groom the eyebrows gently with a spoolie brush.



LIPS

Outline your lips with a nude lip pencil. Fill in with a soft, fresh colour like pink or peach. Use a matte lipstick to keep the pout well-defined.



LIP SERVICE

We write the beauty bible to getting perfect, kiss-worthy lips. From lip scrubs to balms, lipsticks to glosses, brushes to lip treatments, **Samreen Samad** scouts around to bring you the best options for a smooth, healthy and glamorous pout



PHOTOGRAPH: SAKINA ZOJWALA
DEPUTY ART DIRECTOR: SAMEER MORE

1. **FACES** Lip Gloss, Glam On, ₹549
2. **Chambor** Glitzy Gloss, Crystal 803, ₹655
3. **Shiseido** Benefiance Full Correction Lip Treatment, ₹2,400
4. **Bobbi Brown** Lip Balm SPF 15, ₹1,470
5. **Lakmé** Absolute Sculpt Studio Hi-Definition Matte Lipstick, Tangerine Lush, ₹700
6. **The Body Shop** Lipschiff, ₹700
7. **Shiseido** Smoothing Lip Pencil, RD 305, ₹1,225
8. **Dermalogica** Renewal Lip Complex, ₹2,250
9. **L'Occitane** Lip Balm, Zesty Lime, ₹790
10. **L'Oréal Paris** Glam Shine Balmy Gloss, Passion Fruit Perfect, ₹475
11. **The Nature's Co.** Lip-Pop, Berry, ₹295
12. **Guerlain** Rouge, Grenade, ₹2,025
13. **Estée Lauder** Lip Brush, ₹2,000
14. **Bottega di Lungavita** Rossetto Cambiacolore Changing Colour Lipstick, ₹850
15. **Maybelline** New York Color Sensational Lip Liner, Hollywood Red, ₹295
16. **Marks & Spencer** Moisturising Lip Balm, Strawberry, ₹299

Take it FROM THE TOP

Give your favourite nail colour a little lift by setting it with a coat of glitter, gel or matte. **Samreen Samad** finds the best top-ups



1. Maybelline New York Color Show Go Graffiti, Red Splatter, ₹145 2. L'Oréal Paris Color Riche Le Vernis Top Coat, Confettis, ₹299 3. Dior Gel Coat, ₹1,850 4. Sally Hansen Triple Shine, Hypnautical, ₹430 5. Innisfree Eco Nail Color, shade no. 19, ₹300 6. Colorbar Pro Black Fiesta, Merry Blue, ₹500 7. Maybelline New York Color Show Go Graffiti, Blueberry Bombshell, ₹145 8. Sally Hansen Big Matte Top Coat, ₹500 9. Chambor Happy Hues Intense Nail Colour, shade no. 604, ₹345 10. Rimmel London Space Dust, Shooting Star, ₹310

SKIN

I am 23 and have wheatish skin tone. I have extremely dark elbows with tiny boils. I usually keep my hands covered with full-sleeves because of this. Is there a way to clear up the skin on my elbows?

—Riya Lokhandwala, Mumbai

This usually happens due to friction. Apply thick moisturiser with shea butter or cocoa butter twice a day to treat the problem. Avoid scrubbing as this will make your elbows even darker. You could use a glycolic acid-based cream mixed with a hydroquinone cream at bedtime. A salicylic peel is one of the best solutions to get rid of dark elbows. Talk to a dermatologist.

DR JAISHREE SHARAD

Celebrity Cosmetic Dermatologist and CEO of Skinfinity Aesthetic Skin & LASER clinic, Mumbai



MAKEUP

I have acne scars on my cheeks. When I apply foundation, my skin looks even for a bit, but then the scars become more prominent. Please help me with a solution.

—Deepika Gupte, Pune

Only foundation won't cover your marks. You need to address the scars with the right concealer. Kryolan Derma Color Camouflage Crème D5 is perfect to camouflage scars or marks, for wheat to tan skin tones. If you're fair or have pinkish marks, try D4. Apply your foundation first and then use the concealer with a small rounded foundation brush on the spot you'd like to hide. Set with a setting powder.

KAPIL BHALLA

Renowned celebrity makeup artist



HAIR

While the rest of my scalp is covered with thick hair, my fringe is extremely scanty and you can see through to the roots. Please suggest a haircut to solve this problem.

—Karuna Lamba, Jalander

Unfortunately, no haircut can solve this problem. However, you can style your fringe by laying it flat or sweeping it sideways to hide the scalp. Another temporary solution is using a product called Topic. Pick a shade that matches your hair colour and dust it onto the scalp. This will hide your skin, but it should be used sparingly. You could also opt for hair grafting or a hair transplant.

NATASHA NAEGAMVALA

Director of Nalini of Nalini & Yasmin Salon Pvt Ltd



YOU ASK

The one-stop panel for all your skin, makeup and hair questions

Send in your queries to femina@www.co.in

WIN PRIZES

FROM

LOTUS
MAKE-UP

COLOUR DEW™
Nail enamel
6 new stunning shades now on offer



Lotus Make-Up has introduced 6 new shades of **COLOUR DEW™**, an innovative nail enamel that is natural and safe, free from the harmful effects of DBP, acetone, and toluene. Lotus Make-Up COLOUR DEW™ comes in 6 new stunning shades that include Indigo, Emerald Green, Lime'N' Mint, Pink Flirt, Coral Splash and Orange Fusion. So now, add glamour to your feminine side with this marvelous range of nail enamels that is attractively packaged and convenient to use!

Answer the following question to win a fabulous gift hamper:

How many shades of Colour Dew Nail Enamel has Lotus Make-Up introduced?

- a) 6
- b) 15
- c) 5

Three lucky winners will get a gift hamper each from Lotus.

Send in your answers to:
Worldwide Media Pvt. Ltd.
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3rd Floor, Ecstasy IT Park,
Plot 391, Udyog Vihar - Phase 3,
Gurgaon, Haryana-122016

Judges' decision will be final.
All entries become the property of Femina. No enquiries please.
All answers must reach by October 27, 2015

BURN *BABY,* BURN

Whether it is about trimming fat, increasing stamina, getting a bikini-ready body or staying heart-healthy, every workout has a goal. We look at some of the latest fitness trends in India that help you get fit with fun. By **Upneet Pansare**

TABATA: This is for those with no time for exercise. It comprises short bursts of high intensity exercises in just four minutes. It involves a cardio workout (any activity like skipping or running), done for, say, 20 seconds at maximum strength, followed by a 10-second break, and then cardio again. This process is repeated seven times. Japanese scientist Dr Izumi Tabata, the founder, found that high intensity training improves oxygen consumption by about 14 per cent, burns extra fat and builds muscle. Tabata, in comparison, burns more fat than a regular 60-minute aerobic workout.

Join here: Muscle N Mind, 56/57, Kamal Mansion, Arthur Bunder Road, next to Radio Club, Colaba, Mumbai

BMX STRENGTH TRAINING: Delhi-based fitness expert Dr Neeraj Mehta, who developed this workout, says, "Strength training focusses on body movements to ensure that you get maximum benefit without pain or exertion of the joints. This form of exercise is aimed at specific muscles and makes them work harder, so that they perform about 80 per cent of the workout—while supporting muscles are

used sparingly, thus allowing targeted muscles to develop up to four times faster. At the same time, BMX strength training ensures that ligaments and joint tendons remain stress- and pain-free.

Join here: Club Fitness, Sco 5&6, Dhakoli, Zirakpur, Chandigarh

BMX COREBLAST: This intense workout is aimed at strengthening core abdominal muscles. A high intensity workout, it places emphasis on the right posture, movements that isolate the core and abdomen, and hundreds of variations, to build strength and tone the belly.

Join here: GFFI Fitness Academy across Mumbai, Delhi and Chandigarh, with workshops in Bangalore and Chennai

AQUA ZUMBA: Usually performed in a swimming pool, aqua zumba is becoming increasingly popular. Any exercise done in water burns more calories because water is 800 times denser than air and requires more effort to move through. Studies show that jogging in water is likely to burn up to 11.5 calories per minute—on land, you would only burn about eight calories. Aqua zumba is known to not just increase your fitness levels and tone muscles, but it's

**HIGH
INTENSITY
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MUSCLE.**



also a good option for those recovering from an injury. Zumba education specialist and master trainer Sucheta Pal, says, "Pushing against water resistance while performing high intensity zumba moves gives

you a full-body workout. The best part is that aqua zumba can be performed by people who have joint pain or arthritis, and even pregnant women. Plus, it's so much more fun than sweating it out at the gym."

Write to zumbaindia@gmail.com or call 09833363065 for details

SURFSET: The typical surfer's body is well-toned and chiselled to perfection. All that paddling and balancing make for a great cardiovascular workout. For those of us who do not have access to pristine beaches, the next best option is to sign up for a class of Surfset Fitness, a workout that mimics the movements of surfing. Kajal Tejsinghani, who heads India's first Surfset studio in Mumbai, says, "Surfset carves out the perfect surfer body by integrating balance, core strength, cardio, flexibility, agility and power. This enables the body to burn unwanted body fat in high intensity intervals." This workout originated in the US where Mike Hartwick, a former professional hockey player, realised that surfing daily gave him better results in fitness and sports performance than regular heavyweight gym workouts. The main aim of Surfset Fitness is to offer an intense workout that combines pilates, plyometrics and yoga, using a patented surfboard. This helps burn body fat through bursts of high-intensity aerobic training and build lean muscle by balancing on a wobbly surfboard. A single Surfset session can help burn up to 800 calories.

Join here: Surfset Fitness India, 304, Business Suites 9, Swami Vivekanand Road, Santacruz (W), Mumbai

GLADIATOR WORKOUT: This involves the use of combat training and self-defence moves, and relies less on the use of gym equipment and machines. Dr Neeraj Mehta explains, "This technique takes you back to the basics—pushups, squats, jumping, lunges, etc. These require a lot of stamina and energy. This workout can improve cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength,



STEELEXX

Experts say this takes your flexibility to another level. It is a combination of yogic stretches and breathing patterns along with the use of props like dumbbells and barbells.

Join here: GFFI Fitness Academy, across Mumbai, Delhi, Chandigarh, with workshops in Bangalore and Chennai

THE MAIN AIM OF SURFSET FITNESS IS TO OFFER AN INTENSE WORKOUT THAT COMBINES PILATES, PLYOMETRICS AND YOGA, USING A PATENTED SURFBOARD.

flexibility, speed and body balance."

Join here: GFFI Fitness Academy across Mumbai, Delhi, Chandigarh, with workshops in Bangalore and Chennai

WATSU: Watsu, the name for Water Shiatsu, relies heavily on relaxation techniques and acupressure, performed in warm water. As part of the workout, a Watsu expert rhythmically moves the participant's body and massages it. The buoyancy of water ensures that no pressure is put on joints and participants can move freely. Performed in a state of weightlessness, Watsu helps you calm down, slows your breathing and helps rid the body of toxins, tensions and blockages.

Write to info@watsu.in for details 

HOT RIGHT NOW

All that's fresh and fun
on the beauty shelf

MANE CARE

Don't be afraid to experiment with your hair because Pantene has your back. The Pro-V Total Damage Care range of shampoos and conditioners is packed with Keratin Damage Blockers and Histidine that protect hair on a cellular level. It also claims to erase the damage of 100 blow-dries, leaving you with shinier and healthier hair.

AVAILABLE AT: **Leading retail outlets**
PRICE: **Shampoo for ₹110 (180 ml); conditioner for ₹120 (180 ml)**

SENSUAL SPIRIT

Elizabeth Arden's Untold attempts to capture some rather abstract qualities, like sophistication, femininity and sensuality. Packed in a gorgeous bottle, this fragrance opens with crisp notes of pink pepper and bergamot, which make way for fruity accents of pear and blackcurrant. Hints of gardenia and Egyptian jasmine add delicacy to the bouquet. The mixed bag of patchouli, sandalwood, amber and musk is magical.

AVAILABLE AT: **Leading perfumeries**
PRICE: **₹4,980 (100 ml)**

LOUD POUT

Drench your lips in dazzling colours from Rimmel London Moisture Renew Lipsticks. The new and improved range has 25 shades that offer saturated colour and hydration. The creamy texture of the lipsticks promise softness and they glide on easily. They're also enriched with vitamins A, C and E that protect and soften the delicate skin on the lips.

AVAILABLE AT: **Leading retail outlets**
PRICE: **₹450**

SPRITZ ON

Dermats say sunscreen should be reapplied every three to four hours during the day, but how do you do that without ruining your makeup?

L'Oréal Paris is out with a brilliant solution—the UV Perfect Aqua Essence Face Mist. This product is enriched with SPF 50 PA ++++ that protects skin from harmful UV rays and its watery texture allows spritzing without the fear of spoiling makeup. It is also sweat-proof and non-greasy.

AVAILABLE AT: **Leading retail outlets**
PRICE: **₹799**

POWDER POWER

Banish sweat and body odour with dusting powders from Forest Essentials. Made with corn starch and kokum, these organic powders absorb moisture and stickiness to give you soft and dry skin. Like all products from this brand, the powders smell heavenly and come in variants like the Indian Rose Absolute, Mashobara Honey & Vanilla, Nargis, and Oudh & Green Tea.

AVAILABLE AT: **Forest Essentials**
PRICE: **₹595**





SET 'EM STRAIGHT

Tangled about in-salon straightening services? We tell you what works for whom. By **Priya Chaphekar**

Three years ago, when I got my hair straightened, I remember there were just two services—straightening and smoothening. Inspired by Hollywood A-listers like Jennifer Aniston and Sandra Bullock, I decided to transform my tumbling waves into poker-straight tresses. Things were fine at first, then it got disastrous once my natural hair started growing out. Not only did my hair have dual texture, but I also experienced severe hair fall that no number of hair spas or protein treatments could cure. Today, with services like cysteine and keratin, you can now flaunt your natural texture while keeping frizz at bay. The best part—these treatments are non-permanent and wear off in three to four months.

CHEMICAL ELEMENT

Chemical hair straightening or rebonding involves breaking hair's protein bonds, so that curly or wavy hair becomes poker-straight permanently. The procedure begins with the application of a straightening cream on towel-dried hair to break the bond for 15 to 25 minutes.

A visual test must be done to ensure that the hair is processed. Then hair is again rinsed, blow-dried and straightened with a flat iron. The texture is sealed by applying a neutraliser. "Straightening is cost effective for women who want to flaunt straight hair all year long. The treatment lasts up to a year, depending on hair growth. However, it must be done by a hair expert because if not done well, it might lead to woes like excessive hair fall," says Jashmina Jain, style director, Jean-Claude Biguine. Permanent straightening treatments cost ₹6,000 and more at reputed salons. But according to Jashmina, they are not as popular as they used to be. "I used to do up to six straightening treatments in a month; now I do just one. People are afraid to permanently alter their hair structure so they relax only the fringe or the crown."

Celebrity hair expert Coleen Khan suggests smoothening treatments instead of rebonding. "Rebonding gives the hair a very harsh, unnatural look. Hair smoothening will smoothen the hair up to 70 per cent, keeping the look more natural," she says. So are the ingredients in both ➤

treatments similar? “When it comes to permanent straightening, we have set ingredients that we play around with to create the texture that the clients want,” says Rohan Mascarenhas, senior hairstylist, Savio John Pereira salon, Mumbai.

You must be prepared for a mix of straight and curly hair that you will end up having over a period of time. This might make you repeat the process to retain the look. Remember that the treatment breaks the natural bonds in the hair and the chemicals can cause excessive dryness, frizziness and itchy scalp, damage to hair texture, hair fall, split ends and loss of natural shine.

THE CYSTEINE HYPE

This treatment involves the use of a specially formulated cysteine complex with other hair-benefitting nutrients for lustrous, frizz-free, smooth and natural-looking hair. This semi-permanent treatment lasts for up to three months.

“One of the best aspects of cysteine is that it doesn’t involve the use of formaldehyde or other harmful chemicals. The treatment starts with two to three hair washes using a clarifying shampoo. The hair is then blow-dried, divided into sections for the application of cysteine complex and covered with cling wrap for about 40 minutes. After that, it is ironed with flat irons specially designed for this treatment and made to rest for about 20 minutes. In the final step, the hair is washed again with a shampoo and conditioner and blow-dried to reveal smooth, frizz-free locks,” explains Coleen.

Cysteine is recommended for those who want to restore their hair’s natural texture after having undergone a lot of chemical treatments. The good thing is that it does not change the bonds in the hair, but at the same time, controls curls and frizz by 60 to 70 per cent. Post treatment, the use of sodium sulphate-free shampoos and conditioners is recommended to

Cysteine is a naturally occurring amino acid in our hair. It is organic in nature and boosts overall hair health, texture and shine.



increase the longevity of the effect.

“Cysteine is a curl-softening, frizz-removing treatment. It doesn’t straighten hair, but relaxes it. Cysteine is simpler than permanent hair straightening in which you can’t wet your hair, tie it or even tuck it behind your ear for two full days. You can style your hair within 20 minutes of getting the Cysteine treatment done. The duration depends on how many times you shampoo your hair. With every wash, the product wears off, gradually restoring the hair back to its natural form,” says Jashmina.

KERATIN THEORY

Keratin hair treatment, also called a Brazilian blowout or a permanent blow-dry, is a semi-permanent, smoothing and curl-softening chemical treatment made up of chemicals like formaldehyde and keratin. The only difference between keratin and cysteine is that the former contains formaldehyde that makes the hair straighter. “Keratin treatment is perfect for those who want straight, silky smooth tresses. As hair ages, the amount of keratin in it tends to decrease. This treatment ensures that protein is restored to the hair to restructure it entirely,” says Shailesh Moolya, national creative director—hair, Lakmé Salon.

The procedure for keratin treatment is similar to cysteine but the effect lasts a little longer than cysteine. The formula is applied on dry hair for about half an hour and then allowed to be dried into hair using straightening irons. After that, hair needs to be washed once more; you can opt to do this at home or at the salon after a few hours, depending on length and texture. Keratin gives you straight hair without altering the bonds in the hair. It cuts down the blow-drying time, and also smoothenes out hair and eliminates frizz. **■**

WORST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.
BEST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.

WANTED: SKIPPER FOR A GIRL GANG
BACKPACKING THROUGH EUROPE.

If you're a Femina reader between 25 and 40, have a passport, and think you know Europe like the back of your hand, you could be leading a gang of girls on an all-expenses-paid, 15-day trip across Europe. Visit the Femina page on Facebook to win a spot on the next trip of the six we've lined up.





The team discussing how the product fared



REEMA BEHL,
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Unlike other makeup removers that are oil-heavy, Vivel Cell Renew Micellar Makeup Cleanser feels a lot lighter, and suited my acne-prone skin. I used it religiously for one week and followed it up with the usual CTM routine before hitting the sack and woke up to fresher looking skin.

Miracle water

The Vivel Cell Renew Micellar Makeup Cleanser promises to gently remove makeup without drying the skin. The *Femina* panel puts it to the test

SAYANTI BANNERJEE,
SENIOR FEATURES WRITER

I've been hearing about the benefits of micellar waters for ages and I was thrilled to finally get my hands on an affordable, good Indian version. I used Vivel Cell Renew Micellar Makeup Cleanser and it was perfect for my skin type. I hope to use it more often in my after-party kit!



SAMREEN SAMAD,
SENIOR FEATURES WRITER


I am guilty of sleeping with makeup on, especially when I've had a wild night or hectic day at work. I find the drill of washing my face with foam quite tedious. Also, usual makeup removers feel too sticky. The Vivel Cell Renew Micellar Makeup Cleanser is awesome since it removes makeup and dirt in one swipe. My skin also feels fresh after using it.

JAYEETA MAZUMDER,
SENIOR FEATURES EDITOR

The Vivel Micellar Makeup Cleanser is alcohol- and oil-free, both important factors to consider for my combination skin type. I put some on a cotton pad and it glided over my lips to take off my dark red lipstick. Its ultra-mild properties left my skin feeling gently cleansed and moisturised. One clean sweep and all of the makeup, oil and grime are removed.



PRIYA CHAPHEKAR,
SENIOR FEATURES WRITER
CUM COPY EDITOR

I've tried a lot of cleansers. But every time I apply them, they leave my skin oily. Vivel Cell Renew Micellar Makeup Cleanser removes every bit of makeup from my face; even waterproof eyeliners. It is easy to use and my skin feels hydrated. Infact, it is perfect for days when you want to get rid of makeup without a lot of effort. 



Price: ₹349



MY STEALTHY FREEDOM

This Facebook page, with over 8,82,700 followers, is where Iranian women post photos of themselves removing their headscarves in public. Under Islamic law in force in Iran since the 1979 revolution, women must wear a loose scarf, known as a *hijab*, that covers the head and neck and which conceals their hair. The moderator, Masih Alinejad, 38, got the idea in May 2014 when she posted some old pictures of herself without a headscarf in Iran, and asked online if other women had ever done the same. She received thousands of photos, videos, and messages from women who had defied the law. Despite being called a spy by hardliners in Iran, Masih persists, stirring the conscience of humanity to support the struggle of Iranian women for basic rights, freedom and equality. Her latest posts include women coming together to support the Iranian women's football captain Niloufar Ardalan whose husband did not allow her to participate in an international tournament in September 2015. Masih works as a journalist in the US and has won many awards for her work, including the Women's Rights Award at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.

The golden girl

Be it her bold choice of roles, her even bolder decision to produce films at 25 and her confident yet quiet relationship with cricketer Virat Kohli that's based on their middle-class beginnings, Anushka Sharma's got game. She talks to **Sandipan Dalal** about her past movie loves, roles that are redefining her career and future plans to collaborate with young people like her.

Photographs **Prasad Naik**

Just a few days into the shoot of her new film, Karan Johar's *Ae Dil Hain Mushkil*, in London with co-star Ranbir Kapoor, Anushka Sharma is grappling with a common cold she caught during night shoots. It's a demanding film for several reasons. "The film is about unrequited love, and my role is something that has never been seen before," she says. However, what is most important to her is getting to work with Karan Johar whose films she has greatly admired while growing up in Bangalore. "It's a surreal feeling. In the beginning, I was nervous but

I'm comfortable now," she says, coughs and then clears her throat. Johar's film is not the only thing she is working on. After the stupendous success of *NH10*, she has commissioned three new films under her banner Clean Slate Films. At 27, Anushka has amazing resolve and clarity that is hard to find, and is effortlessly juggling roles of an actor and producer. "I'm in a good place but I want to achieve a lot more," is what pushes her to do other things, including scouting new talent. Edited excerpts from the interview: ➤





PK broke records at the box office, NH10 showcased your chops as actor and producer and Dil Dhadakne Do let you sparkle in a rom-com role. You seem to be on a hot streak.

I believe cinema is a director's medium and I have been very fortunate, having done different roles in quick succession under the best directors of our times. Even though *Bombay Velvet* didn't do well, it allowed me to showcase my versatility as an actor. I'm glad I can do the kind of work I want to do, even if it means cultivating stories (as was the case in *NH10*) that I want to see on screen. Whenever I have felt an inclination towards anything, I have gone after it with a lot of conviction and faith. I rarely bother with trends in the industry or how films in the past have done. I was 25 when I decided to be a producer and the last two years have been the most productive of my life. This continues with the three films that we (the actor and her brother Karnesh) are in the process of making.

Do you feel run off your feet, balancing a full-time acting career with your production house Clean Slate Films?

I have started to learn to prioritise. Today, I understand and see my work and commitment in a different light. I derive a lot of strength from the fact that at 27, I'm not only acting in films, but also have the ability to put a film together. Frankly, I feel in my element doing both. I've always been the kind of person who is looking to do extra. When I was in school (Army Public School, Bangalore), I was one of the toppers in my class. I was also part of the dance team, debate club and excelled at the 100 metres race. When I was 15, I started modelling along with studying. So I have been multi-tasking all my life.

How do you measure success today?

To me, success is the ability to do the things I want to do. Like at 25, when I heard the story of *NH10* and instinctively decided to produce it. Then, at 26, finding takers and appreciation for the film—I count that as one of my biggest successes. I come from a non-filmi background so one of my achievements is my solid conviction; I don't get swayed by past successes and failures.

“I RARELY BOTHER WITH TRENDS IN THE INDUSTRY OR HOW FILMS IN THE PAST HAVE DONE. I WAS 25 WHEN I DECIDED TO BE A PRODUCER AND THE LAST TWO YEARS HAVE BEEN THE MOST PRODUCTIVE OF MY LIFE.”

Tell us about the new films that you have recently green-lit.

Our idea is to work with a set of talented new people, who have a different voice, outlook and vision. Akshat Verma, the writer of *Delhi Belly*, is making his directorial debut with a hilarious film. I remember laughing out loud while reading the script on a night flight back to Mumbai; fellow passengers were giving me irritated looks. We are firming up another collaboration with Navdeep Singh (director of *NH10*) as we connected well as a team.

Earlier this year, you were also unfairly blamed for India's crisis at the World Cup by frustrated fans. How did you deal with this?

Initially, I thought it was started by a bunch of uneducated people. But when I visited their profiles on Twitter I came away even more surprised; they were marketing executives and engineers. It made me realise so many things. Our society is still so misogynistic; I was being made aware of my sex and the perception that I was only good at being a distraction. I also saw a complete lack of compassion for our fellow beings. It was very annoying.

Did you fall back on anyone for support or advice at that time?

My parents and I talked about it at home. They are very rational people and understand the society we live in. They just told me, imagine ➤

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what girls and women living in smaller towns and villages are dealing with every day.

You have stepped out with Virat publicly over the last year. Would you say you are in a happy place personally?

We are like-minded individuals from middle class families and whatever we have achieved today is because of our hard work. Our values are very similar and we are grateful for what we have today. Having shared our life’s experiences has made us stronger.

A big part of your life today revolves around your new film, Karan Johar’s *Ae Dil Hain Mushkil*, for which you’re filming in London with Ranbir Kapoor. Can you talk about your role?

The film is about unrequited love, and the role I’m playing is something that hasn’t been seen before. I was nervous during the initial days of shooting, but now I’ve become comfortable with my part.

Considering that you have grown up watching his films like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (KKHH) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (K3G), what’s it like to work with Karan Johar?

Just the other day, on set, when Ranbir and I were naming popular films of the ’90s and early 2000s, we listed Karan’s films along with



Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge and *Dil Toh Pagal Hai*. When I watched KKHH, I wanted to be Sana Saeed, who played the young girl. I wore a similar headband for months, and even enacted parts of the film with my colony friends. So being directed by Karan is a huge deal for me. I have lots to be grateful for.

You’ve achieved a lot for someone who’s just 27. What drives you to keep going?

I don’t come from a film background and have a different way of looking at things—and that has helped me a lot in my journey. And now my brother and I are very keen to collaborate with other people like us. **f**



The girl who changed Facebook

She changed the way we saw the biggest social networking website in the world by creating News Feed and received hate mails from Facebook users for it. **Reema Behl** meets Ruchi Sanghvi, Facebook's first woman engineer

mathematical language to predict the future of a system. "Before starting out, I decided to go and check out my office space. I saw a little cubicle on this floor full of cubicles and had a panic attack! I couldn't work in a company that I wasn't a core part of. So I packed my bags and moved to California. The first company I interviewed at was Oracle and within two weeks I was working there." It was at Oracle that a friend told Ruchi about Facebook's California office. "I thought Mark Zuckerberg was still working out of his dorm in Harvard. I was curious to see the office. So I went to Palo Alto," she says, adding that the first thing she saw was a chalkboard that said 'Looking For Engineers'. Imagine graffiti on walls, people crammed on a few desks and on the floor—this was the first Facebook office located above a Chinese restaurant. "The energy in the office was palpable. Even though Facebook had just launched and the risks were high, I wanted to be a part of that environment; working on a product >

Ruchi Sanghvi had got her wisdom tooth extracted and couldn't speak much. She, however, insisted on doing the interview on the designated date. Ruchi, one of the most integral members of the Facebook team, is nothing if not tenacious. "I wanted to take over my dad's business as a child just because he said it is a man's world. (He supplies heavy machinery for infrastructure projects.) Instead of being crushed by what he told me, it made me even more determined to prove him wrong. So I took all my decisions, like studying

electrical and computer engineering in college, with the main objective of taking over his business." Clearly, Ruchi has a knack for standing out—she was one of five female students in a class of approximately 150 at Carnegie Mellon University, US, and the only woman engineer at Facebook when she started out.

Top of the timeline

After college, Ruchi landed a job doing math modelling at a bank in New York in 2004. Math modelling involves making abstract models using



Ruchi at her home in the US

I used every day. After four months at Oracle, I left to join Facebook.” Her interview with founder Mark Zuckerberg is another story in itself. “My interview was scheduled for the morning but they had all been up the previous night so no one came to the office until 3 pm. It was a tough but interesting interview. There were only 20 of us when I joined the team. Today they have a thousand employees and over a billion users.”

The game-changer everyone hated

At a recent talk in the US, Ruchi remembers asking the audience if anyone remembered what Facebook looked like before News Feed was launched. She barely saw any hands go up. “It was a static webpage with links to profiles, search and parties. I knew we could do better. Facebook was about connecting people and we wanted to show you news about your friends and people you cared about.” When News Feed was launched, users got extremely upset and, overnight Facebook groups like *We hate News Feed* and *Ruchi is a devil* sprang up. “People were going to

organise riots to protest against it. There were journalists outside our office for the first time. However, we realised that there were more page views than ever. The very people who said they hated it were able to spread the word and organise protests because of News Feed. Today, it is the distribution and engagement engine of Facebook.”

It's complicated

In 2007, Ruchi took a sabbatical from Facebook to come back to India to find a husband at her parents' insistence. “Arranged marriage made a lot of sense to me—you find someone who shares the same interests and comes from the same background. At home (Pune), I went through the complete arranged marriage process, but within seven months, I realised it wasn't what I wanted and so I went back to the US.” Within a year of her return, she got engaged to her long-time friend and co-worker at Facebook, Aditya. It was Ruchi who popped the question.


Logging off

After being at Facebook for five-and-a-half years, Ruchi and Aditya decided it

“PEOPLE WERE GOING TO ORGANISE RIOTS TO PROTEST AGAINST NEWS FEED. THERE WERE JOURNALISTS OUTSIDE THE FACEBOOK OFFICE FOR THE FIRST TIME.”

was time to move on. Was it difficult for her to have ‘the talk’ with Mark? “I had worked on all aspects of Facebook by then and was really passionate about starting my own company. He understood that and we still are good friends.” In 2010, Ruchi and Aditya created Cove, a collaboration and productivity tool for large groups and communities. It was later acquired by Dropbox, an online file sharing platform, where Ruchi started her new role as the vice president of the organisation. “We got a bigger stage at Dropbox. I took over business operations and did a lot of things—from recruiting and communications to marketing. I took it up as an interesting challenge.” In 2013, she resigned from Dropbox; her husband still works there. “I needed some time off. So, I travelled for a few months.”

What's next in store for Ruchi? “I am doing a lot of research about the areas I am interested in. I imagine what I would have done had there been no constraints in terms of funding, people, etc and that's how I figure what I'm truly passionate about.”

Ruchi says she's never seen her role as one that is defined by gender. “I got where I did on the basis of merit. There is an increased demand for women engineers because we tend to build a collaborative culture.” What advice would she give women engineers who want to follow in her footsteps? “Don't be afraid of the unknown because that's where opportunities lie. Take risks, raise your hand, empower yourself and ask for those opportunities.” 

LADIES WHO LINK

Priyanka Gill was curious about what young Indian women read online. When she didn't find anything custom-made for them, she decided to create it herself. By **Reema Behl**

When Priyanka Gill moved to London in 2000, she didn't think she would return to India. Come 2015, and she's moved here bag and baggage, to run what's turned out to be a lucrative business. Priyanka freelanced for many Indian publications during her 15 years in London, and also became an angel investor for some start-ups in London. The digital revolution was unfolding and Priyanka knew that women were consuming a lot of content online. "The number of women online in India will grow from 60 million today to 300 million by 2020. But what do they read online?" That is the question that began her journey as an entrepreneur.

What women want

Priyanka did extensive research and met many investors as well as entrepreneurs in London to gauge the online reading

habits of Indian women, here and abroad. "There was no website that was exclusively dedicated to Indian women in the age group of 18-34. That became the core problem I wanted to solve." In November 2012, Priyanka was introduced to Namrata Bostrom who was then at London Business School. In June 2013, they launched eStylista.com—a NRI focussed magazine

talking to women across the world. Since the bulk of their traffic was coming from India, they relaunched eStylista.com as POPxo.com in March 2014. Priyanka explains the name, "It's about pop culture, it's popular, and it's fun, dynamic and energetic—everything the modern Indian woman needs. And it's brought to them with love—xoxo!" Today POPxo.com is one of India's fastest growing websites in the fashion, beauty and lifestyle segment. Priyanka and Namrata have now moved to New Delhi from London.

Digital first

Priyanka feels that not going the print route and constantly studying what Indian women want has kept POPxo.com ahead of other websites. "We saw websites like BuzzFeed get

"The number of women online in India will grow from 60 million today to 300 million by 2020."


a lot of traffic and opted for the listicle format as the online reader's attention span is very short. We offer content in Hindi since many of our readers prefer that." POPxo.com gets 2.5 million unique visitors every month and posts almost 10 new listicles daily. Priyanka is looking at expanding into the mobile space as well. "We want to integrate more features in our app. Presently, all the website content is available on the app."

Going viral

Clearly, the formula is working. Priyanka

says, "We monetise by working across formats (display ads, native ads, social posts, events) with brands who want to reach our important and influential consumer base. Also we have a dedicated network of fashion and beauty bloggers. We engage them with brands too for greater reach, and this generates revenue as well. Our monthly earnings are anywhere between 15-25 lakhs."

Priyanka has raised ₹5 crore in funding till now and is looking at raising another \$2 million in Series A funding. "Since I used to invest in start-ups in London, I used my savings and got funding from friends and family initially."

Moving forward, Priyanka is looking at integrating the option of online shopping on the POPxo website and app. "Right now, we are just content providers. We want this to be a two-way conversation where we engage the readers, and strengthen our online community as well." 

CEO 101

"Sometimes you might have a great idea but if it is not scalable, it is not good enough. Always think of how you can grow your idea into an enterprise in today's digitally savvy world and then move forward."



SILK SMITHA (1960-1996)

SHOW, don't tell

No other actor of her time had the body confidence of Silk. The tag of B-grade star didn't come close to summing her up. Silk Smitha was bigger than any label ever cast on her. **Kayal Thanigasalam** remembers a woman who had no trouble baring her body, but who could never quite trust the world with her heart

When *The Dirty Picture* released three years ago, the publicity murmurs hinted that it was a biopic inspired by the life of Silk Smitha. The mere mention of her name generated a surge of voyeuristic thrill among movie-goers. We didn't know it, but the erotic screen goddess of the '80s still lurked languidly in the ooh-la-la land of our imagination. Though it had been almost two decades since she died, people hadn't quite forgotten Silk—she of the syrupy lips, slumberous eyes and proud, voluptuous form.

The Dirty Picture turned out to be one of the biggest blockbusters of 2011, and brought lead actor Vidya Balan fame and adulation—as much for her bravura performance as for the lush girth that she went about gaining with the discipline of a method actor. The applause around the movie was punctured timidly by a defamation case filed by Silk's brother V Naga Vara Prasad against director Milan Luthria. One wonders what Silk would have thought of all the furore. Having been an almost reclusive person, one would expect her to smile cryptically and shrug her shoulders. Not many can sport a similar nonchalance, though. Milan Luthria weighs his words carefully. "I did focus on a few aspects of Silk's persona, but other than that my movie was not about Silk Smitha. It was about

the discrimination towards women in the '80s and '90s who chose to be item dancers. According to me, these women who performed bold scenes back then were just as ambitious as today's male actors who show off their six-pack abs."

However, ambition was not the fuel that spurred Silk when she started, though it did become a constant companion once she tasted success. Born into a family of poor farmers in Eluru in Andhra Pradesh, she was forced to give up her education when her parents couldn't afford to school her after Std 4. (There were fleeting rumours that she was married off very young, and fled her in-laws' home to seek refuge in her aunt's house in Chennai.) Back then, she was not Silk; she was Vijayalakshmi, a simple south Indian girl. In Chennai, she started out as a touch-up artiste for small-time actors and then filled in for minuscule roles in forgettable films. Fame came calling on a tentative note in the middle of a mundane moment, when Tamil director Vinu Chakravarthy noticed her at a flour mill. The septuagenarian still vividly remembers the first time he met her. "She had come to the flour mill opposite my house to collect her order. The moment I saw her, I knew she was the perfect woman to play the role of Silk, an arrack shop owner, in my film *Vandichakkaram*." After offering her the role, Chakravarthy and his wife rechristened her Silk Smitha and groomed her rigorously over the next

Silk took pride in what she did, and it showed





*Even flops,
re-released with
**a 10-minute
item number
by Silk, were
resurrected
into hits.***

couple of months. "We taught her how to walk, talk, dance and act in a seductive manner."

With the release of *Vandichakkaram*, Silk set the benchmark for onscreen sensuality in south Indian cinema. She took pride in what she did, and it showed in her body language that often made people squirm, not because it bordered on unabashed exhibitionism but because her unblinking gaze seemed to tear at their thin veneer of decency. Even flops, re-released with a 10-minute item number by Silk, were resurrected into hits. (There was even a movie titled *Silk, Silk, Silk* where she played a triple role.) At the pinnacle of her fame, she was known to charge ₹50,000 per dance number and shot for two to three item numbers every day, earning a lot more than most leading heroines back then. In a career that lasted 17 years, Silk acted in over 450 films, and shared screen space with almost all the superstars of her time.

Tamil action hero Thiagarajan who acted with Silk in over 12 films remembers her as a workaholic. "She was very dedicated and punctual. In *Alaigal Oivathillai*, in which she was cast ➤

She was anxious about doing character roles. She was worried that a performance oriented role would adversely affect her glamour quotient.



(Clockwise from above right) A still from *Vandichakkaram*; striking a pose for a photo shoot; with Kamal Haasan in *Sakalakala Vallavan*; a picture taken by director Balu Mahendra



as my wife, she played a de-glam role of a middle-class woman. Her sensitive performance won her a lot of appreciation." Bharathiraja, director of *Alaigal Oivathillai*, remembers the touching vulnerability that few noticed about her. "She had a clean heart. After the release of *Alaigal Oivathillai*, she shared with me her anxieties about doing character roles. She was worried that a performance-oriented role would adversely affect her glamour quotient."


Between shots, she retreated into the vanity van and hardly mingled with her co-actors. She preferred silence over studio banter. "Once there was a ruckus because a legendary actor took offence when she continued to sit cross-legged on her chair while the rest of the crew stood up to greet him," reminisces Chakravarthy. "When I asked why she had behaved so rudely, she disclosed that she was embarrassed to approach a senior artiste while her underwear was peeking through the skimpy skirt that she was wearing for the dance sequence. She was only trying to protect her dignity! This sweet innocence about her was very endearing."

In an industry often known for its superficial friendships, Silk remained an anomaly because she genuinely found it difficult to reach out to people she didn't feel close to. Shakeela, queen of Malayalam soft porn cinema, remembers her with ardent reverence in her autobiography *Shakeela Atmakatha*. Shakeela was once cast as Silk's younger sister and a slapping scene between the two turned far too authentic for comfort. Silk slapped her too hard and Shakeela, who was a newcomer then, remained cold and unforgiving on the sets afterwards, even when Silk apologised and tried giving her a hug. A few days later, she invited Shakeela



over to her room and gifted her a box of chocolates. "She said it was gifted to her by someone and she wanted to pass it on to me. But I understood that she had got them for me. She was just reluctant to say this openly..." For all her no-holds-barred ways on screen, Silk worked hard to keep her emotions concealed. Chakravarthy recalls, "People in the industry made use of her sex appeal, but when she did not oblige their personal favours, she was portrayed in a demeaning way."

Like everything else about her, her personal life was shrouded in mystery. No one knows much about her live-in partner Dr Babu, except that he was already married. Babu cajoled her to produce films and cash in on her popularity. But the two movies she produced flopped and left her with a debt of ₹2 crore. The third was grounded abruptly mid-schedule because of lack of funds. By the late 1990s, her career hit a block. Directors found it difficult to get her dates due to her over-packed schedules. Silk retreated into a friendless space where she battled her demons alone, the way she had done all her life.

On September 23, 1996, she committed suicide by hanging herself from the ceiling fan in her room. Her suicide note said she was frustrated with the repeated failures in her life. She was only 36 then. People have many theories about her death. She died with the answers tightly guarded within—just the way she had chosen to live all along. 

queen of lotions,
potions, solutions

damsel-in-distress
-in-denial

social media
butterfly

recovering
bingoholic

For all the women you are
FEMINA

Baby Halder's first book, *Aalo Andhari*, documented her life as a child bride, domestic worker and survivor of abuse, and has been compared to such powerful memoirs as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Angela's Ashes*. In her third book, Baby revisits the places where she grew up and Hemchhaya De meets her to understand what makes her story both personal and universal



A VOICE FROM THE MARGINS

Baby Halder was 13 when she was married off to an abusive husband and by 26, she was a mother of three. How she went on to dominate India's literary horizon is a story that has always intrigued me. To find out more about this incredible life and about her new book, I visited Baby's home in Halishahar, a couple of hours' drive from Kolkata. As I made my way through a labyrinth of leafy lanes and bylanes, I was greeted by a soothing rural landscape, complete with marshes, thickets and a glorious abundance of water bodies. The 41-year-old Baby built a one-storeyed house with her modest income from royalties, after spending 16 long years in Delhi. The house with its small lawn in the backyard stands out from the cluster of mud huts in the neighbourhood. "I'm extremely sorry for the inconvenience—I am new to the area myself and I hope you don't mind sitting on the floor. I am yet to furnish my house." I notice, however, that the writing station in her bedroom is ready for use.

“I’D LIKE TO THINK THAT I WAS NEVER MARRIED—I WAS JUST SOME GIRL WHO WAS HITCHED WITHOUT HER CONSENT.”

Baby shot to fame with her very first book, *Aalo Andhari* (Light And Darkness), a searing autobiography that has been compared to *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Angela's Ashes* for its clear-headed account of a life that is ordinary in the Indian context—extreme poverty, abuse, exploitation—but extraordinary in its spirit. Born in Jammu and Kashmir, Baby lived in several parts of the country with her father, Narendranath Halder, who served in the Army as a truck driver. She was just 13 when she was married off to a man almost 14 years older. It was a nightmare from the start. Her husband physically abused her—once hitting her with a rock in a fit of jealousy—and raped her on several occasions. She got pregnant within a few months of marriage and gave birth to her first son, Subodh. Another son and a daughter followed. “I’d like to think that I was never married—I was just some girl who was hitched without her consent. No girl should suffer what I have gone through. I used to fight with my husband regularly, asking him to change so that we can give our children a good education and better living conditions. I didn’t want my sons to remain tea stall workers for the rest of their lives.”

Unwilling to tolerate the abuse any more, Baby moved to Delhi at the age of 26 with her three children. Denied support by her elder brothers, she started working as a domestic help in Gurgaon. It was a struggle to support her family. “It is not easy for a single woman. A woman living on her own invites drunken leers—they questioned my ‘character.’”

Life changed for the better when Baby landed a job at Professor Probodh Kumar’s house. The grandson of legendary writer Munshi Premchand was the force behind her decision to take up writing. Professor Kumar would often spot Baby, who had studied till the seventh standard, reading from his large collection of books. Impressed by her dedication to the written word, he encouraged her to document her own story.

She rose to the challenge. In unadorned language, shorn of any self-pity, Baby wrote about how her mother left them one fine morning—she simply went to the market and never returned. She recounted how her schooling was interrupted because of a lack of funds and interminable domestic tensions. In 2003, her book *Aalo Andhari*

was published by Roshani Publishers, a Kolkata-based publishing house, and was met with great success. Its English translation by Urvashi Butalia, titled *A Life Less Ordinary*, went on to make Baby a best-selling author internationally.

Aalo Andhari has been translated into 25 Indian and foreign languages. “I was flying high—my first interview was with the BBC,” recalls Baby, her bright eyes widening. “There were innumerable reviews in foreign and national media. I travelled to foreign lands such as France, Germany and Hong Kong.”

She clearly remembers her first visit to Germany. “Some of my teeth needed to be replaced, thanks to the sub-zero temperatures in the German city of Halle,” says Baby, laughing heartily. “I couldn’t eat the scrumptious food offered to me at that time!” Her second book *Eshat Roopantar*, a 2010 sequel to *Aalo Andhari*, is being translated to English by Urvashi.

Her third book, *Ghare Ferar Path* (The Way Home), was released by Nabaneeta Dev Sen and other eminent authors in Kolkata. It is about her return to places such as Jalangi and Durgapur in Bengal where she had spent a substantial part of her childhood.

As she returns to her roots through her book, Baby has also found her own spot of calm in Halishahar. She hopes her move back to Bengal will free her up to focus on other aspects of her life. She is also considering a change of career and has an offer from an NGO in Mumbai called Stree Mukti Sanghatana. “I need to work. My children are not settled yet,” says Baby, as she shows me around her freshly painted house. “Besides, I want to see new places, meet new people. That will inspire me to write.”

Despite the international acclaim, Baby feels that the language barrier is a disadvantage. “The recognition didn’t quite translate into huge financial gain for me,” says Baby, who still does all her writing in longhand. “Because I cannot communicate in English, a lot of people have misled me. I don’t understand copyright or royalty issues much.”

Misgivings aside, the author is content with what she has achieved so far. “I don’t have regrets. I am happy with what I have got in life. Sometimes, I do yearn for companionship. My daughter tells me to try the Internet to find a friend!” Baby Halder is ready to start a new chapter. **f**

Baby at her home in Halishahar

THE MAKING OF THE DEVI

It's a man's world out there in Kolkata's celebrated potters' hub, Kumortuli. Yet a handful of women have been challenging this ancient monopoly. We speak to a rare breed of artisans who are breathing life into wet clay to create a goddess they call their own, a warrior woman who is their mascot. By **Hemchhaya De**





Up until a couple of decades ago, some artisan families wouldn't even let their women participate in the idol-making business. But pioneers such as the late Kamakhyabala Pal have changed the rules. Through hard work and top-notch craftsmanship, contemporary artists like Mala Pal and China Pal have inspired several other women to enroll themselves in the Pal artisan community in Kumortuli. Battling financial lows and competition, these women artisans are fighting to keep a tradition alive in the alleys of Kumortuli—a small settlement of artisans in Kolkata that gives 'birth' to Durga. Meet Mala, China and younger artists, Kanchi and Kakoli, as they deal with a deluge of demands for idols this festive season. These are the women behind those enraged eyes, those confident pursed lips, that powerful vision we call Ma Durga. And this is their story of survival. >



MALA PAL: 'HOW CAN A GIRL SPEND SO MUCH TIME WITH MEN IN THE WORKSHOP?'

It's about five minutes to Mala Pal's studio if you are entering Kumortuli from Rabindra Sarani near Sovabazaar in North Kolkata. Located just at the turn of a narrow lane in Kumortuli's Banamali Sarkar Street, Mala's workspace is non-descript and dimly lit. You will find naked mini idols, freshly painted or half-made, scattered everywhere in the studio—on an induction stove, on ladders leading up to a makeshift second floor and perched on the many electricity meters on the four walls. Mala is a multi-tasker, making idols at breakneck speed to meet Durga puja demands, supervising her labourers, obliging photographers and tourists, and looking after her ailing mother who lives in a cramped room behind her studio. Mala, who has won several state awards for her craftsmanship, specialises in miniature, 'foldable' Durga idols that are exported to Europe, Australia and Canada where pujos are organised by the Bengali diaspora. The diminutive 41-year-old took over the reins of making idols in

Kumortuli when her father died in 1985. With almost no help from her elder brothers, who gave up the family enterprise, Mala has been single-handedly running her studio over the past three decades. She quit school at the age of 15, but made sure that her younger sisters passed the secondary board exam and married early. "Initially, the men in other Kumortuli studios would pass snide remarks—how can a girl spend so much time with men in the workshop?" she recalls. "My mother asked me to ignore such comments. When I got an invitation to show my work at a fair in Delhi in the late '90s, people started respecting me." Mala visits Delhi from time to time to display her work or offer lectures at the capital's National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum. "I have gone through a lot of financial hardship, but now I have received some recognition and the business has been profitable," says Mala. "But even now some male colleagues tell people, 'She is a woman, how can she handle big puja orders?'"

Mala Pal carefully puts the first coat of paint on her clay idols



"I HAVE GONE THROUGH A LOT OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP, BUT NOW I HAVE RECEIVED SOME RECOGNITION."

CHINA PAL: 'I LEARNT THE TRADE ON MY OWN WITH MY MOTHER'S SUPPORT'

China is a self-confessed workaholic. And she refuses to talk about her personal life. "I am known by my work, so let's just focus on my profession," cautions the celebrated Kumortuli artisan before her interview with us. China was just a teenager studying at Baghbazar's Nivedita School for Girls when her father, Hemanta Pal, died in 1994. Hemanta was a renowned idol-maker in Kumartuli. After his death, China, the youngest of six siblings, started shouldering the responsibility of managing her father's studio. Her father never really wanted his daughters to work in Kumortuli. But in the last few years before his death, he started training his youngest daughter. Her two elder brothers were not keen on running the family business and settled for less strenuous jobs. "Ours is a harsh business. Everything is time-bound and you have to deliver your products on time because *pujo* is organised on certain

fixed days in a year," explains China, who is in her late 30s and runs a team of 12. Some members of her own family objected to her working with men at the workshop. But her mother encouraged her to stay put. "No one cooperated. Even my brothers didn't help. I learnt the trade on my own, with a lot of support from my mother," says China, who has received state awards, including a governor's award for best craftsmanship. She specialises in *ekchala* idols (all idols mounted on a single frame). Her goal is to build her own studio elsewhere in Kolkata. "This is my father's studio—people know it by his name. I want to start something that will bear only my imprint," says China dreamily. She admits that making idols demands a lot of physical strength and involves spending odd hours on the streets to assemble them, source raw material from far-flung areas, keeping in mind safety issues—it's not everyone's cup of tea. ▶



China Pal moulds the clay idols into desired shapes, then draws the features of the goddess to perfection



"THIS IS MY FATHER'S STUDIO—PEOPLE KNOW IT BY HIS NAME. I WANT TO START SOMETHING THAT WILL BEAR ONLY MY IMPRINT."



KANCHI PAL: 'I DO MUCH BETTER BUSINESS THAN MANY MALE ARTISTS HERE'

As we enter Kanchi's spacious workshop in Kumortuli, we spot a large group of women accompanied by a couple of off-duty policemen from the local thana trying to drive a hard bargain. The women are from the police residential quarters nearby and they have come to Kanchi to buy a Durga idol. They want her to slash her prices for them. Kanchi is in no mood to bow down to their demand. However, with a little push from *bodo babu* (head of the local thana), Kanchi settles for a discount of ₹10,000. Needless to say, Kanchi is one of the most sought-after new generation artists in Kumortuli, giving her male counterparts stiff competition. She learnt the craft from her mother, Archana Pal,

and took over the business when her father, Nrisimha Pal, died about seven years ago. She is a one-woman army—crafting the idols, supervising her labourers, and taking care of finance and the business aspects. "There is no difference between a male and a female idol-maker," stresses Kanchi, whose husband works in Kuwait. "I believe in thorough professionalism. I deliver my products on time and there are no flaws with my idols. I take good care of my workers who are the backbone of my business—we share meals together." She was the first woman artist in Kumortuli to win the prestigious Asian Paints Sharad Samman Award in 2014, an award instituted to felicitate Durga puja artisans and their work every year. "Even about eight years ago, my father used to make six idols. Now, I make 45, on an average, every year. I do much better business than many male artists here." Kanchi has a 11-year-old son who's learning the ropes from her. ➤

Kanchi Pal at work in her spacious workshop in Kumortuli with idols that are almost ready to be painted

"THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MALE AND A FEMALE IDOL-MAKER... I BELIEVE IN PROFESSIONALISM."

permanent resident
of the 60s

backyard
environmentalist

nobody's
fool

every little niece's
favorite aunt

For all the women you are
FEMINA



KAKOLI PAL: 'I HAD NO IDEA HOW IDOLS WERE MADE'

Unlike Mala, China or Kanchi, Kakoli Pal doesn't have a dedicated studio. She sculpts the idols on a narrow Kumortuli lane, lined with shanties, public toilets and studios belonging to male artisans. She has repeatedly appealed to the authorities to provide her with a studio to rent, to no avail. She has also given up on getting any form of financial help from the state government. She went through financial hell when her husband, a Kumortuli artisan himself, died of a brain stroke about 12 years ago. Her eldest daughter

"EVERYTHING CHANGED AFTER MY HUSBAND'S DEATH—I HAD TO LEARN THE CRAFT. OTHERWISE MY GIRLS WOULD HAVE STARVED TO DEATH."

was seven years old at that time, and her youngest, barely a few months. She hails from Krishnanagar in Bengal's Nadia district. She had no formal training in idol-making—she was just married off to a Kumortuli artisan. "When I came to Kolkata after our wedding, my mother-in-law wouldn't let me venture out of the house. So I had no idea how idols were made or how the business was run," recalls Kakoli. "But all that changed after my husband's death—I had to learn the craft and tackle the business aspects. Otherwise my girls would have starved to death." But with a little help from neighbours, Kakoli managed to make ends meet. She makes around 25 idols a year, mostly for household pujas. But her struggle hasn't ended, as the market is fiercely competitive and there are some constraints for women artisans. "I cannot go to remote places to source materials due to safety issues. My workers get poached, so I find it hard to grow my business the way I want to," she rues. **f**



Kakoli Pal at her makeshift workspace on the streets of Kumortuli, working on her unfinished idols



“I SPOKE FOR ALL UNWED MOTHERS”

Nikhat Mariyam Nirusha decided to live life on her own terms when she moved from Allahabad to Mumbai. That resolution was tested the most when she decided to raise her son alone and unmarried. This is Nikhat's story in her own words, as told to **Shilpa Sharma**

My son was born out of a live-in relationship with a married man, and I do not feel guilty. Every time I found myself thinking about how I wanted to live my life, I had just one answer—I wanted to live unafraid. That was asking for a lot, considering I hailed from a conservative Muslim family in Allahabad. My father was not in very good health and the responsibility of five daughters and one son fell on my mother's shoulders. I was determined to share the financial responsibilities, and started working from a very young age.

I used to write scripts for a local radio station in Allahabad and do theatre. There were days when I would come back late from practice sessions and the boys in our theatre group would drop me. In the Dariyabad locality in Allahabad, where we lived, that was taken to mean that I was a girl of “loose character”. What others thought about me or how they perceived me never mattered; all I wanted was to earn for my family. That is when I took the decision of moving to Mumbai in the hope of finding better opportunities.

In 2000, I came to Mumbai with just ₹1,200 in my pocket. I had no plans; I knew >



“I WAS REGARDED AS ONE OF THE BEST EMPLOYEES AND I EVEN COMPLETED AN ASSIGNMENT AND GOT ABOUT 200 PIECES DESIGNED IN JUST TWO DAYS.”

I was here to work. In three days, I had exhausted all my money. I lived in a gurudwara for a week, even as I went around looking for jobs, but found nothing. I took up three part-time jobs to sustain myself in the ‘city of dreams’ and started staying in a paying guest accommodation. It just came with one caveat—you couldn’t stay there from 10 am to 8 pm. You could just go there to sleep. I barely found space to sleep but I had no other option.

Around that time, I met Sahil (name changed) who was a part of my theatre group in Allahabad. Meeting Sahil was the best thing that had happened to me since I moved to Mumbai. When he confessed that he had feelings for me, I felt myself drawn to him. However, he also told me that he was married. I was surprised but when he mentioned that he was seeking a divorce from his wife, my feelings got the better of me and I decided to go ahead with our relationship. Looking back, I think it was probably my loneliness in a new city and the need to be with someone

familiar that corralled us together. Sahil and I eventually started living together and I got a new job around the same time. Life was finally beginning to look good.

I was introduced to one of the leading costume suppliers of the television industry and he offered me a job—I had to carry clothes for the artistes to the set and bring them back again. I ensured that I did my job well and, eventually, the production house where I worked offered me the post of assistant costume director. I was regarded as one of the best employees and I even completed a rigorous assignment and got about 200 pieces designed in just two days. But my growing popularity stung my senior designer and I was fired after a few months.

I suddenly found myself jobless again, and Sahil had still not divorced his wife. I felt dejected and locked myself up in our house for four days. I only stepped out on the fifth day, when I had made up my mind—I decided to join the same industry and become one of its most successful costume designers.

After struggling for almost a month, I found a production house in Mumbai that was launching a new TV show. So I asked their team to hire me on a trial basis. They were >



“CHANGING A LAW DOESN'T CHANGE THE PAROCHIAL MINDSETS OF PEOPLE. SO I FILED A CASE AGAINST THE SCHOOL THAT REFUSED TO ADMIT MY SON.”


impressed with my work and I eventually got the job. One year later, I was nominated for Best Costume Designer at an award function. With my career in place, I had to find a way forward in my personal life as well. It had been almost three years and Sahil had still not divorced his wife. Call it love or delusion, I kept hoping that one day he would leave her and marry me. When I got to know that Sahil's wife was pregnant, it shattered me. However, Sahil was somehow able to assuage my fears and convinced me of our future together.

Another two years passed and I was pregnant with Sahil's child. I asked him for an answer. He had none. I found myself at the crossroads, not knowing what to do with my life. My words came back to me. I had to be unafraid. So I decided to keep the child. Things changed between Sahil and me after that. I fought with him and was all alone throughout my very difficult pregnancy. Even my parents shunned me. For my delivery, I went alone to the hospital, filled all the forms and got myself admitted. No one came to see me.

I joined work within 15 days of my delivery. Now I had the responsibility of taking care of my child as well and I was working round the clock. Every morning I would tie a baby-carrier around my waist and head to work. My son went with me, wherever work took me—from studio shoots to outdoor locations. He filled me with a unique sense of fulfilment that I had been devoid of for years. Sahil's hollow promises continued but his role in bringing up our son was minimal. I had begun to get a clearer picture of him but I still clung on to a tiny ray of hope that he would accept me as his wife. That never happened.

When the time came to admit my son Manal to school, I filled the forms, leaving the father's name column blank. Sahil never was a father to him. The school refused to give him admission. Though there were three other schools that were ready to admit Manal I decided to raise this issue. A child born out of a live-in relationship can use his mother's name on official forms, but changing a law doesn't change the parochial mindsets of people. I filed a case against the school authorities, asking them to recognise the validity of my son's application. At that time, I felt I was echoing the voices of all the unwed mothers in the country. I eventually won the case and the school was asked to issue an apology to me and admit my child with immediate effect.

A similar situation cropped up when I had to get my son's passport made. The woman at the passport office refused to let my son's form move ahead and said it would be rejected by her higher-ups because it did not have his father's name. She even called my son a mistake and that had a profound impact on him. On our way back from the passport office, he kept asking me if he was a mistake. I knew I had to do something. I wrote a blog post about the incident and later got an apology issued from the passport office. It took me a long time to change my son's perception of his own self but he understands me now.

I don't have any earth-shattering achievements to my credit but I feel like a winner today. And what have I earned? Respect for being myself. Call me a rebel but I take pride in living my life without any fear of persecution by society, and I firmly believe that only when you respect yourself will the world respect you. 



They say women cause wars. Then the examples offered range from Helen of Troy, Cleopatra to Draupadi—all mythical legends. Recorded history does not name a single woman at the forefront of terror and war. However, it does say that women and children are the worst hit in troubled times. *Femina's* new campaign, Women For Peace, throws the spotlight on soldiers who form the army of white flags

Taslima Nasreen is known for her powerful writing on women's oppression and her unflinching criticism of religion. Several of her books have been banned, and she has been blacklisted and banished from both Bangladesh and West Bengal. But a *fatwa* won't keep her from speaking her mind, finds **Hemchhaya De**



'MY VOICE CANNOT BE SILENCED'

Bangladeshi author and former physician Taslima Nasreen has lived in exile since 1994. Her novel *Lajja* (Shame) in 1993 (in which a Hindu family is persecuted by Muslims) changed her life and career. Islamists in Bangladesh issued a *fatwa* against her in 1993, demanding her arrest and execution for blasphemy and insult to religion; the offer of a reward to anyone who puts her to death remains in force till this day. After fleeing Bangladesh in 1994, Taslima spent the next 10 years in exile in the West. She relocated to



Kolkata, India, in 2004, where she lived until 2007, when her autobiographical series *Ko* (*Speak Up*) and *Dwikhandito* (*The Life Divided*), were banned for "hurting religious feelings of the people". But there is no stopping Taslima—she has written 37 books in Bengali, which includes poetry, essays, novels and series of autobiographies. She has been invited to speak in many countries and at renowned universities across the world and has become a symbol of free speech.

Increasingly there are reports of bloggers being killed or threatened in Bangladesh. What is the future of creative independence there?

This culture of thwarting freedom of speech or creative independence didn't grow overnight in the country. I'd say Islamisation started right from the mid-80s in Bangladesh. Our secular constitution was changed. A lot of foreign funds came into our country to radicalise our schools and our education system. In fact, a section of our youth has been brainwashed ▶



Taslima says creativity cannot prosper in an atmosphere where rationalist or secular bloggers and writers are not protected

into becoming Islamists. They are killing in the name of Islam. Successive governments did nothing about it because they needed to please their vote banks to stay in power. They are not keen on protecting talented, rationalist or secular bloggers and writers. Not all blogger deaths are coming to light. The authorities are asking free-thinking young intellectuals to stop hurting 'religious sentiments' when they should be telling perpetrators that strong punishment will be meted out to people hacking bloggers to death.

Why do you think the Bangladeshi government seems apathetic about protecting the creative freedom of bloggers?

A large section of Bangladeshis is deeply religious. If Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

"AS SOMEONE WHO HAS LIVED ABROAD IN EXILE, I KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO CONTINUE WRITING IN A FOREIGN LAND, IF YOU DON'T GET TO HEAR YOUR MOTHER TONGUE AROUND YOU."

is seen punishing killers in order to protect atheists and rationalists, this part of the population might consider the leader to be a *naastik* (atheist) herself. This perception might be detrimental to her electoral prospects.

A number of these bloggers, including Washiqur Rahman, Avijit Roy and Niladri Chattopadhyay (Niloy Neel), were my friends on social media. Some of them were part of the Taslima Paksha (support) group and used to organise marches in the streets of Dhaka. Militant group Ansar Bangla has openly said that they will target anyone who speaks against Islam. I doubt if the talented bloggers who are escaping to foreign countries will ever be able to write again. They write in Bangla and as someone who has lived abroad in exile, I know how difficult it is to continue writing in a foreign land if you don't get to hear your mother tongue around you. Also, the threat to their lives will remain even if they are living abroad—just look at the Charlie Hebdo incident.

How would you compare this with the scenario in India, where well-known Indian scholar and rationalist MM Kalburgi was killed, and before that rationalist Narendra Dabholkar.

India has a stronger democracy. So it's a shame that fundamentalists are targeting the atheists in this country. It seems that a culture of intolerance is rearing its ugly head. Is India trying to be another Bangladesh? This country is a true pillar of secularism and a torch-bearer of the freedom of expression in the sub-continent. The killers of Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and Kalburgi are still at large. India must make every effort to nab them and set an example for other smaller countries in south Asia. While the number of atheists in Western countries is growing, fundamentalism continues to hold sway in several parts of the sub-continent, especially where political instabilities are the order of the day. Even in conservative America, a recent study has shown that increasing number of the clergy oppose anti-abortion, anti-divorce and anti-homosexuality movements. ➤



"OUR OBJECTIVE WAS TO MAKE WOMEN FROM BOTH COMMUNITIES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE DURING THE CONFLICT WITHOUT JUDGING WHOSE PAIN WAS MORE EXCRUCIATING."

(Top) In exile, Taslima now spends her time reading and writing books. She lives in Delhi with her pet cat Minu; (far right) one of the many protests against Taslima and her writings

Post the rise of the Modi government, there has been a rise in the culture of banning things in India—from beef to porn sites. What is your opinion on this?

I wouldn't say that this culture of banning started in India with the Modi government. This culture has always been there. My book *Dwikhandito* (*Split Into Two*) was banned by the Left Front government in Bengal in 2003. A couple of years ago, a serial, based on my short story, on a private Bengali channel was pulled off the air by the Mamata Banerjee government before it could even premiere. I was almost under house arrest during the Congress rule. You have to consider banning in all its forms. In 2010, Rohinton Mistry's book, *Such A Long Journey*, was withdrawn from the BA syllabus by the University of Mumbai after protests by the Shiv Sena. The culture of banning has continued through the years.

Churni Ganguly's National Award winning film, *Nirbashito*, contained overt references to you. What is your reaction to the film?

Churni's film is not a biopic. Had it been a biopic, it perhaps wouldn't have seen the light of day in theatres. It didn't show real events—for instance, why I was banished from Kolkata in 2007. They couldn't show why fundamentalists organised protests against me in Kolkata because then, they would have to talk about the reason: I criticised Islam. And



then they would have to show how I was put under house arrest in Kolkata and Delhi. They circumvented all these and focussed on my pet cat Minu, my separation from her and how difficult it was to send her to me while I was in exile. A lot of people wanted to make films on my life and they had to step back. I am a forbidden subject. So I give Churni full marks for going ahead and making the film. Her film is a resounding slap on attempts at hushing up any kind of discourse on my life.

A section of the population in both countries feels that you are fuelling Islamophobia. What do you have to say to them?

That's something coined by fundamentalists. If you criticise Islam, you will be called Islamophobic. It's a political tactic. You won't find Hindu-phobics or Christianity-phobics. It's as if you can criticise all religions, but not Islam, even if there are widespread killings and oppression of women in the name of this religion. I don't criticise Islam only—I criticise and speak out against anti-humanist and anti-women elements in all religions. But I criticise Islam more because I have grown up in a Muslim country and I have studied the religion. My voice cannot be silenced. **F**

'I'VE ALWAYS PLAYED FLAWED CHARACTERS'

Imran Khan has a take on everything—from gender equality to women-centric films. And that sets him apart in an industry filled with yes men. A thoroughly sorted guy, Imran tells it like it is. By **Hemchhaya De**

Q You have always maintained that you are averse to playing roles that typify Bollywood heroes. How much did you relate to your role in *Katti Batti*?

A. I have always been drawn to playing relatable roles, right from my first film, *Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na*. I don't want to play 'super heroes'. I have always played flawed characters. They may not strike the right notes in the beginning, but they manage to redeem themselves in the eyes of the audience. So, people start accepting them and gradually fall in love with them. My role in *Katti Batti* is no different.

Q What's your take on this wave of women-centric films, post *Queen*?

A. Some years ago, before *Queen* hit the theatres, Vidya Balan delivered smashing performances in films like *Kahaani* and *The Dirty Picture*. There's a gap of three years between *Tanu Weds Manu* (2011) and *Queen* (2014). Even before that, in the '70s and '80s, living legends such as Hema Malini, Rekha and Sridevi did women-oriented films. Some like *Seeta Aur Geeta* went on to become blockbusters. So this wave of pro-women films is not new. When some films make good business, they become the flavour of the season. I believe we have supremely talented actors in our industry and talent always gets recognition. It will be a bit simplistic if we just stick to man-woman equations.



What qualities do you admire in Kangana Ranaut? Kangana cares for her craft. And I admire this quality in any artiste.

Q You have always acted in films where women protagonists have a strong presence. It's not something many Bollywood actors do. Would you say that you have gone against the grain?

A. You know, after *Katti Batti*'s release, a lot of people were not happy with the length of Kangana's role in the film. People keep telling me that I am doing women-centric films. *Katti Batti*, however, is wholly my film; Kangana is there in about 25 per cent of it. >

Do you take critical feedback from Aamir Khan for all your films?

Until *Katti Batti*, I felt none of my works was worthy of being shown to Aamir. In our family, we hold ourselves to high standards. We don't constantly praise or celebrate each other—we believe in giving constructive feedback. I never showed my films to Aamir because I thought he would not appreciate them. *Katti Batti* was the first because I felt very confident about my work. I was thrilled when he told me that I was the best thing about the film.

FRANK SPEAK

STRAIGHT CUTS

₹100 CRORE FILMS OR INDIE FILMS?

Today, a ₹100 crore film is the benchmark of success in the industry. It doesn't matter if it's profitable; if it hasn't reached the ₹100 crore mark, it hasn't quite made it. I haven't been able to process this criterion fully. When I choose a film, I depend on my creative instinct and sensibilities. But, of course, there are instances when you start a film with a particular conviction or expectation, and the end result doesn't match up.

HOW HAS FATHERHOOD CHANGED LIFE?

My priority system is more refined. If I am going to a promotional event or shoot, I weigh it against the time I am taking away from my family and I decide accordingly—I could then bypass an event and focus on playing hide and seek with my daughter. I would like my daughter to be proud of my work. Of course, that doesn't mean I will do only children's or family films. In fact, a lot of people ask me if I would like to do only family films, now that I am married. No! I know for sure that when my daughter grows up, she would tell me, "Delhi Belly was the right choice."

WHAT DOES GENDER EQUALITY MEAN TO YOU?

Gender equality will come when people will no longer have to talk about women's rights or gay rights separately—they would just talk about human rights.



Your daily fitness regimen.
Functional training, not traditional gymming. The aim is to stay fit, and the focus is not on aesthetics.

A rival you enjoy competing with...

Everyone is a rival but there are no rivals worthy of me (laughs).



Is there a diet that you follow?
No, I am a foodie.

One woman in Bollywood you find sexy.

Actresses are not really my 'thing'. If you have worked with actresses, you would know what I mean (laughs).

An instance when you got tongue-tied because a girl floored you.
Never had much luck with women (laughs).



First crush

When I was 12-13 years old, there was this sweet girl in my school. We remained friends for a long, long time.

First time you had your heart broken...

At the age of 15.

It was a really ugly break-up. We stopped talking to each other and she left the country.



Have you ever used your star status to get out of a sticky situation?

You know, when cops ask me to pull over, it's not because I break traffic laws—it's because they want to take photos with me.

Your very own how-to-woo-your-girl guide?

Just one advice to men—don't be lazy.

Your all-time favourite movies.

I don't really believe in such lists. But Lock Stock And Two Smoking Barrels and A Fish Called Wanda had a deep influence on me. I don't really watch Bollywood films (laughs).



OUT OF THE CLOSET, INTO OUR HEARTS DHEE FROM DHAKA

Last year, Bangladesh got its first LGBT magazine Roopbaan, and support poured in from every quarter, every country, even as controversial Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen congratulated the initiative. This September, the country's first lesbian comic was launched. The comic book, Dhee, is the story of a girl who is attracted to other girls. Dhee's fears and hopes, in many ways, reflect that of the country's growing LGBT community. Hundreds attended the launch at the British Council in Dhaka, even as entry was carefully scrutinised to halt protests. Most LGBT people are forced to live fearful double lives in the deeply conservative country where 90 per cent of the population is Muslim. But it looks like Bangladesh is ready to take taboo topics head on. The community has grown assertive of its rights and has held low-key pride marches in the recent years. "By creating Dhee, we want to shape perception of LGBT people, because we should be free to choose whom to love," said Mehnaz Khan, one of the four developers of the comic.

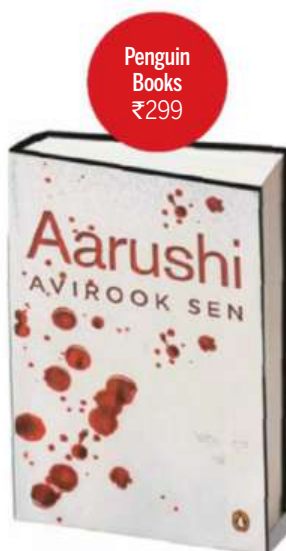


The creators plan to use this flashcard-formatted comic to conduct 15 countrywide campaigns that will fight gender bias.

AARUSHI Avirook Sen

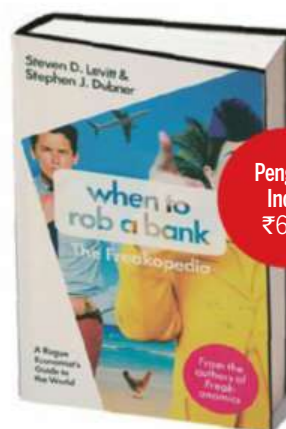
EDITOR'S
CHOICE

A teenage girl and her domestic help are killed and no one knew who did it. Was it the other house help? Was it the girl's upper middle class parents? In the eyes of the law, the answer was clear. Doctors Rajesh and Nupur Talwar were sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering their daughter Aarushi and domestic help Hemraj in 2008. Journalist Avirook Sen's well-researched book, *Aarushi*, chronicles how the court and the CBI came to that conclusion. The book is about a court trial and an investigation that seemed to go awry for various reasons—the ineptitude of the investigators, the

Penguin
Books
₹299

presumptuous nature of the CBI officers and a hurried judgement. The book, however, does not provide a definite answer to the most important question: did the convicted parents really do it? But it does bring to light a series of doubts about whether there really was enough evidence to convict the Talwars. I've read plenty of arguments on this case and had so far been unable to form an opinion. But with this excellent book—which incidentally brings back memories of reading the other masterpiece of the same genre, *In Cold Blood*—I'm pretty sure I know who the guilty party is.

By Parita Patel

Penguin
India
₹625WHEN TO
ROB A
BANKSteven D Levitt and
Stephen J Dubner

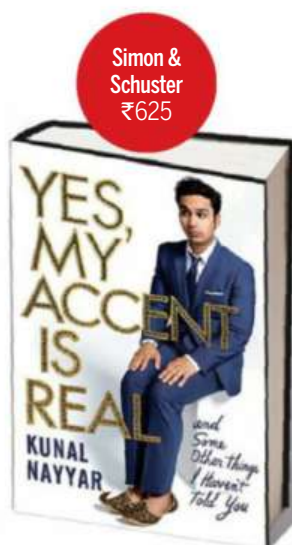
The *Freakonomics* guys are back with yet another bestseller in the making. This book is a collection of slightly edited posts from their popular blog, *Freakonomics*. Journalist Stephen J Dubner and economist Steven D Levitt celebrate 10 years of *Freakonomics* after four mammoth books and smash-hit podcasts. But choosing from over 8,000 blog posts is no mean feat. When you read the book, you might get a sense of déjà vu, especially if you follow them online. But you won't mind the repetition, thanks to the boisterous wisecracking of the two lovable authors who have an unusual take on the economics of everything. Sample the topics—'Why don't flight attendants get tipped?', 'If you were a terrorist, how would you attack?', 'And why does KFC always run out of fried chicken?' If you are a *Freakonomics* aficionado, you will want this on your bookshelf. Their style of presenting how economics actually works in life through anecdotes is inimitable. And, for ardent fans, their contrariness is delightful. **F**

By Hemchhaya De

RECOMMENDED
reads

YES, MY ACCENT IS REAL

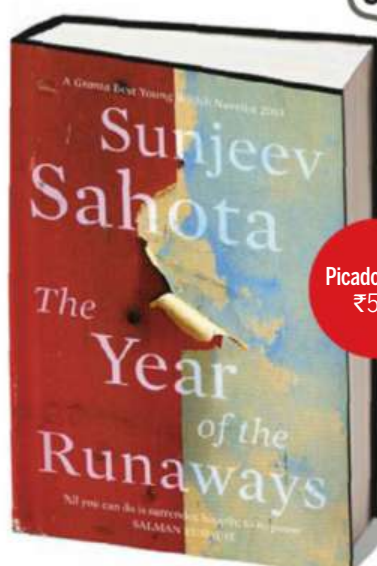
Kunal Nayyar

Simon &
Schuster
₹625

Even as *The Big Bang Theory* and its merry band of physicists continue to rule our hearts, Kunal Nayyar, who plays Raj Koothrappali in the popular TV show, has penned a fun memoir. Technically, it's a collection of essays by the 33-year-old Indian-American actor. Kunal gives his fans a generous glimpse of things they might not have known about him—for instance, his love for Winnie Cooper from *The Wonder Years*, 13 things he learnt while playing an astrophysicist in the show, his guide to 'getting nookie' in Delhi,

his big, fat Indian wedding, and little nuggets about his life in the US. As Kunal himself puts it in the prologue, "When I was 18, after manoeuvring my way through a billion people and a few cows, I moved to Portland, Oregon, where I studied business, cleaned toilets, lied my way into an IT job, and fell in love twenty-seven times... Somehow this crazy journey landed me on a little television show called *The Big Bang Theory*." What follows is an endearingly witty account of his personal journey.

By Hemchhaya De

EDITOR'S
CHOICE

THE YEAR OF THE RUNAWAYS

Sunjeev Sahota

Sunjeev Sahota's book traces the dreams and everyday struggles of a hidden community in Britain. Thirteen young men live in a house in Sheffield, each in flight from India. The motley bunch of characters build up to the realisation that for new arrivals in Britain, life can be just as hard as back home. Tarlochan, a former rickshaw driver, has decided to bury his past in Bihar. Avtar has a deep, dark secret. Randeep has a visa-wife in a flat on the other side of town—who has cupboards full of her husband's clothes in case the immigration men come calling. It is easy to see why Sunjeev earned a place among Granta's Best Young British

Novelists of 2013, a Man Booker shortlist this year and a glowing review from one of the greatest writers of our century—Salman Rushdie. His narrative shuttles between England and India, shifting between childhood and present day, ensuring you sympathise with the characters even when they commit crimes. Sunjeev highlights the differences in background in his characterisations even as he reflects on India's caste and class politics. However, it's not merely a political novel—it brings to life the human experiences of the migrants struggling to forge a new life.

By **Jayeeta Mazumder**

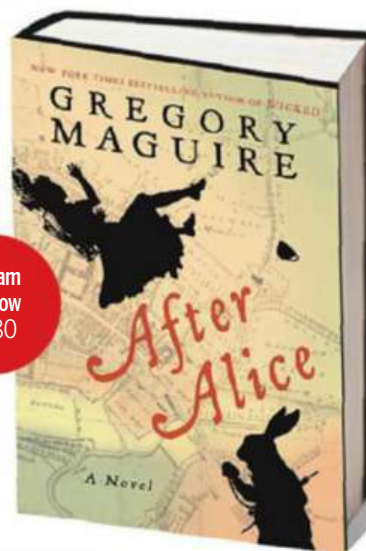
AFTER ALICE Gregory Maguire

The first time I read Gregory Maguire was right after watching the long-running popular Broadway musical *Wicked*, a modern-day take on *The Wizard Of Oz*. And to revisit it from a fascinatingly refreshing perspective was an utter joy. Naturally, I was kicked to find out that Gregory had penned a spin-off to *Alice In Wonderland*.

The narrative begins with Alice tumbling down the rabbit-hole, leaving the Oxford of the 1860s behind. What happens to that world after she disappears? Gregory's dazzling imagination runs amok in this novel.

Ada, a friend of Alice's, mentioned very briefly in the original, is off to visit her friend and tumbles down the rabbit-hole herself. It is now up to Ada to find Alice. The White Rabbit, the Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts come back with wilder eccentricities. In an interview, Gregory says, "Alice is a permeable membrane. Her childhood leaks out of her, escaping her as she lives on the page. Jo March (*Little Women*) is stuck in 19th century... But Alice is immortal. She has become our sense of childhood." I couldn't agree more.

By **Jayeeta Mazumder**



FINDING AUDREY Sophie Kinsella

Contemporary and fun, Sophie Kinsella's new book deals with the serious issue of anxiety disorder and depression, with easy hilarity. The story revolves around 14-year-old Audrey and her quirky family. Audrey, a victim of bullying, puts herself under house arrest. But all of a sudden, her brother's friend comes along and changes her life.

The style of writing is easy and fresh. Sophie has done a great job researching everything, from therapy sessions to video games. The elements of pop culture in the narrative make

the novel realistic and relatable. The characters are interesting and funny. Whether it's the nagging mom or the gaming addict brother, it's hard not to fall in love with Audrey's eccentric family.

Sophie ensures you become part of Audrey's journey as she copes with fear, anxiety and hope. Her sessions with Dr Sarah are heart-wrenching and her victory becomes yours. And the sweet young romance that blooms in between all of this, is truly endearing.

Finding Audrey is a sweet and funny book, with moments of real insight.

By **Samreen Samad**

BATTERY FULL

If your smartphone is a shameless battery hog, blame that big screen and all those apps. Here are a few hacks that can help keep you powered up, finds **Joyoti Mahanta**

CHEATS FOR ANDROID

BATTERY DOCTOR: This is just what the doctor ordered to keep your phone's juices flowing. This free app shuts down power-hungry background apps and settings. It's easy to use, available in 27 languages and shows you what's draining your battery. It comes with three 'charging systems' (speed, continuous and trickle) to ensure optimum battery levels and tells you how much longer you should keep your phone plugged in and when you might be overcharging.

BUT: The app may overheat the CPU. It mutes your phone to conserve energy, so adjust the volume to take calls.

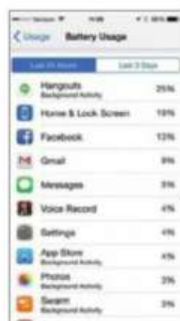


CHEATS FOR IOS

BATTERY LIFE PRO: This free app displays battery levels in the form of a speedometer. You can slide right to change the app's colour scheme, but slide left and things get interesting.

The app allows you to select from among six main services (Bluetooth, Mail Push, Wi-Fi, Push, 3G and EQ) and to see how much of your iPhone's battery you would spend if you enabled them. It monitors power consumption, providing you with detailed info on how long your device will last without charging.

BUT: Though it does the job well, this app is not rated too well for its interface.



JUICE DEFENDER: This app lets you manage common connections and battery draining components such as mobile data, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. Once you feed your user profile into the interface, it runs by itself, improving battery life in an automated matter. There are multiple preset modes, like 'aggressive' and 'balanced,' which allow for toggling and scheduling, background synchronisation, and choosing which apps can keep your screen on.

BUT: The free app is only the start. You have to shell out quite a bit to get Plus and Ultimate versions.



BATTERY DEFENDER: This app allows you to toggle between connections such as GPS, Wi-Fi, mobile data, and Bluetooth. When the battery is draining, it disables features if you're not using your phone. A great feature is its Genius Scan/Sync, which allows the app to sync its data with the phone every 15 minutes while still saving battery. The adjustable 'quiet sleeping' option disables Wi-Fi and data connections at night, so you can snooze undisturbed.

BUT: It had a few compatibility issues with Android 5, but the recent upgrades have reportedly addressed this problem.

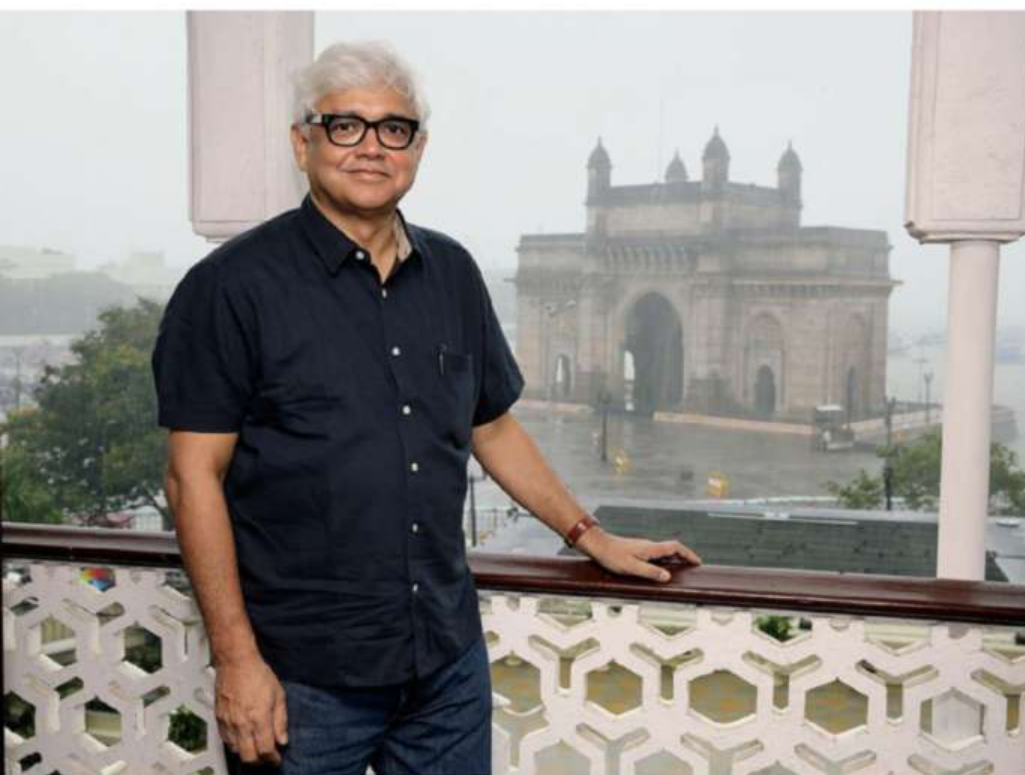


BATTERY: This simple app provides the basic yet the most vital information about your iPhone's battery. It is fast and displays everything on one screen. The interface is clean and minimal, and shows the user the current battery charge and the time it will take for any of the eight most important apps and processes to drain it. It displays the percentage in the notification bar, so you know when to save your battery.

BUT: There are no upgrades or an ad-free version. If you don't update it, its estimate of the time remaining might be inaccurate, though rebooting helps.

BATTERY MANAGER: This app helps you micromanage your iPhone usage. If you use some functions more than others, you can list them out, for the app to make the necessary tweaks to improve battery life. While you select your usage time, it will dynamically adjust the amount of time that your iPhone will last on battery for the remaining processes. For example, if you mostly use your phone for calls, the app will spare battery life for this and adjust other functions, which you may not frequent regularly.

BUT: There are many bugs that need to be addressed.



“MY BASIC ENGAGEMENT IS WITH LANGUAGE AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF LANGUAGE, AND THAT’S WHY I AM A WRITER.”

Of Fire, concludes with the results of the war and the official British takeover of Hong Kong in 1841. Amitav is adept at underlining cross-cultural links within shared histories, through his motley bunch of characters. He also uses the politics of language to its utmost potential—the pidgin English of the Lascars, the dialect of the sailors of the Indian Ocean, the bastardised Hindi of the sahibs and memsahibs. His wordplay is ingenious.

Perhaps his expertise as an anthropologist makes him old-school in his approach to field research. But he does admit to benefitting from Google’s vast reservoirs. He blogs regularly but doesn’t feel the need to have a verified Twitter account like his contemporaries. He still carries hardcover books along (and requests his publisher to courier them to his home address), and is easily impressed with the vintage cassette interface of my recording app. Excerpts from the interview. ▶

‘THE WOMEN IN MY BOOKS ARE NEVER VICTIMS’

The grand finale of Amitav Ghosh’s epic Ibis trilogy came to a fitting end with *Flood Of Fire* but there’s a chance that he might return to his favourite characters with a different book. In an interview with **Jayeeta Mazumder** in Mumbai, the author discusses the challenges of writing about an undocumented era and drawing inspiration from Tagore’s women

There are quirks that Amitav Ghosh steadfastly holds on to. His cup of tea has to be made following his instructions to the letter. And he’s very particular about his tea (he insists I try the Castleton Muscatel). He fishes out a sugar sachet—a brand that he prefers—from his shirt pocket even as you try not to look too bemused. He then

throws a volley of questions at you and convinces you that he’s genuinely curious about your life. This is my third meeting with him in eight years, and this is a pattern he’s repeated, in that very order. The Padma Shri-winning author did, after all, start out as a journalist and interviewing people was mandatory for his research as an author later.

For *Sea Of Poppies*, Amitav had to trace stories in India and China to chronicle the First Opium War (1839-42) between Britain and China. *Sea Of Poppies* (2008) is largely set on the former American slave ship, *Ibis*, and focusses on opium production in India. The second part, *River Of Smoke* (2011), tracks the *Anahita*, an opium ship, to Canton. The final book, *Flood*

You have lived with the characters in your trilogy for over a decade. Will it be easy to let go of them?

As far as I am concerned, the Ibis trilogy is completely finished. But will I return to the characters in some form in some other book? It's quite possible. For me, living with these characters has almost become a habit. When you've been working with them for 10 years, it's a really long time.

The women in your novels show a sense of defiance. Both Deeti and Mrs Burnham upset established hierarchies in their chosen relationships. Paulette runs away from sexual harassment and decides to cross-dress. How did you go about giving them a stance?

I really can't say that I have a plan or a method. The women characters come to me the same way the male characters do. For me, what defines a character is that they try and make their own way in the world. That they don't think of themselves as victims and each tries to make the best of their circumstances according to the best of their abilities. And this has always been the case—I remember a time when societal repressions were much more pronounced, and I have seen them up close. But even in that world, as I have seen in my own family, I realised that there will be women who will absolutely defy norms. I remember as a child, in my conservative joint family, how my aunt just defied everyone and walked away because she wanted to be an actor. I think what you see in my books—even though

many of the characters lived through very difficult circumstances—is that none of them are victims.

The women in the Ibis trilogy evoke the same sort of spiritedness that Rabindranath Tagore's women characters embody. Has he been an inspiration?

Certainly! Tagore's *Ghare Baire* is the perfect example of that, and so is *Charulata*, which is one of my favourite films of all time. When Satyajit Ray was making these adaptations, he really focussed on the breaking of boundaries by the upper-class, educated woman who was conventionally forced into purdah, and how she came out of the purdah. But what you don't see in Tagore

those scenes visual is an enormous compliment for me. I wasn't apprehensive, though. My basic engagement is with language and the possibilities of language, and that's why I am a writer. In *Sea Of Poppies*, I was really exploring the dimensions of the colonial mastery of language but also the nautical language. In *River Of Smoke*, I was exploring its trade dimension. In *Flood Of Fire*, I thought I would explore a very different dimension of language, which is that of its suggestive and erotic power. If you notice, I have never mentioned any body part, nor is any sexual act described in detail. So I thought, what if this book was written 50 years ago when there were censors? What really interests me then

“FOR ME, WHAT DEFINES A CHARACTER IS THAT THEY MAKE THEIR OWN WAY IN THE WORLD...ACCORDING TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITIES.”

or so much in Ray, although it is always implied, is that the men also have other women in their lives. And those women are of a completely different kind: they have, in some sense, already taken control of their lives. But the narrative that interests Ray is actually the narrative of the bourgeois woman.

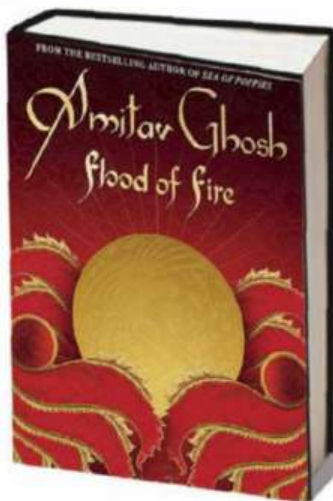
Your readers are not used to reading visually erotic scenes. Were you apprehensive about their reaction to the scenes between Zachary Reid and Mrs Burnham?

The fact that readers find

is how to elude these censors. I don't think there is anything in my book that could be censored (*laughs*).

Do you think books that weave history into a fictional framework should be introduced in schools?

I think if I, as a writer, knew that my books would end up in the hands of school children, it would really change my style of writing. My books are full of scandalous things and I don't know if I would want children to read them! It's hard enough to know that your mother and your own children might read them (*laughs*). **F**



The Ibis trilogy ends with *Flood Of Fire* that picks up threads from the earlier two parts—*Sea Of Poppies* and *River Of Smoke*—weaving together a riveting tale of history erased from our collective memory

DECADES OF TRUST, LOST IN TWO MINUTES

In June this year, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) banned the sale of the country's favourite two-minute snack after tests showed that 30 out of 72 samples procured for study exceeded the permissible levels of lead. Maggi noodles were found to be 'unsafe and hazardous' for consumption. The FSSAI also alleged that the company misled consumers by writing 'No Added MSG' on the packaging, and also stated that Nestle had begun sales of the oat variant without approval from the governing bodies. Many states banned Maggi noodles, following which, Nestle said that it would recall all Maggi packets. However, in August, the Bombay High Court overturned the ban and called for fresh tests within six weeks. Nestle India managing director Suresh Narayanan told PTI that the company would re-start manufacturing by the end of this year. When asked if the company would change the ingredients of this decades-old brand, the MD said "what has worked for 30 years," will work in future too.





INSTANTLY *better*

High-carb, MSG, lead, preservatives, empty calories—the case against instant noodles, despite the ban lift, remains strong. Chef Chaitanya Sharma of Four Seasons, Mumbai, shows us how you can use alternative ingredients to create healthier options of your favourite bowl of comfort. By **Upneet Pansare**

A nutritious bowl
of pumpkin
noodle soup





Butternuts, cucumbers, zucchinis, carrots, pumpkins, courgettes, radishes, sweet potatoes and beetroots are great for making vegetable noodles.

Potato noodle salad with chilli oil is refreshingly light



Bruschetta is a quick and easy-to-make appetiser

NOODLE SUBSTITUTE: BELL PEPPER

Bell pepper noodle bruschetta

SERVES: 2
PREP TIME: 5 minutes
COOKING TIME: 5 minutes

1 piece each of red, yellow and green bell pepper
extra virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove, chopped
salt and pepper, to taste
1 baguette
1 tbsp chopped basil leaves



1. Make fine, long juliennes of bell peppers using a knife.
2. Heat olive oil in a pan. Add garlic and stir. Add bell peppers and sauté briefly for 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper. Keep aside.
3. Slice the baguette, toast the slices and apply olive oil on one side of each slice. Place the bell peppers and garlic mixture on the baguette slices. Garnish with basil. Serve hot.

Bell peppers are excellent sources of vitamins E, K and B1, dietary fibre, manganese, phosphorus, and magnesium.

NOODLE SUBSTITUTE: POTATO

Potato noodle salad with chilli oil

SERVES: 2
PREP TIME: 10 minutes

180 g potato noodles
2 tbsp groundnut oil
2 red chillies
1 tsp sesame oil
1/2 tsp rice wine vinegar
1 tbsp spring onion
1 tsp sesame seeds
salt, to taste

To make the potato noodles

1. Peel the raw potatoes. Use a spiraliser or slicer to make noodles.

To make the chilli oil

2. Heat tbsp of groundnut oil in a pan. Add red chillies and stir for about one minute. Then add the remaining groundnut oil. Heat until the oil is warm. Remove the pan from the heat and cool.

To make the salad

3. Toss the noodles with 2 tbsp chilli oil and other ingredients and serve. >



godmother of
abandoned pets

champion
of powerpoint

wizard of odd

many times
bitten,
never shy.



For all the women you are
FEMINA



Pumpkin noodle soup
is like a meal in a bowl

Pumpkin is known to be good for skin, make eyesight sharp, aid weight loss, reduce the risk of cancer and boost immunity.

NOODLE SUBSTITUTE: PUMPKIN

Pumpkin noodle soup

SERVES: 2

PREP TIME: 10 minutes

COOKING TIME: 10 minutes

300 g pumpkin

2 tbsp oil

2 tsp shallots, chopped

1 clove garlic, chopped

1 tsp lemongrass, chopped

1 tsp kaffir lime leaves, chopped

150 ml vegetable stock

salt and pepper, to taste

100 ml coconut milk

2 bird's eye chillies, thinly sliced

1 tsp coriander leaves, chopped

2 tsp fresh cream

1. Make noodles of about 100 g of pumpkin using a spiraliser or slicer. Or use a peeler to shave thick ribbons of pumpkin and cut the ribbons lengthwise into thin noodles. Keep aside.

2. Heat oil in a pan and sauté shallots, garlic, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves for about one minute.

3. Cut the rest of the pumpkin into medium-sized slices and add them to the pan with the sautéed ingredients.

4. After the pumpkin is a little soft, add the vegetable stock.

5. Once this is cooked, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. Then blend the ingredients in a mixer till you achieve the consistency of a purée.

6. Pour the purée in a pan and season with salt and pepper. Add the noodles to the puree and let them cook for two minutes. Add coconut milk. Garnish with bird's eye chillies, coriander and fresh cream, and serve hot. ➤



Courgettes contain very few calories. They are also known for high levels of water content and soluble fibre.



NOODLE SUBSTITUTE:
COURGETTE

Courgette noodle halwa

SERVES: 2
PREP TIME: 5 minutes
COOKING TIME: 15 minutes

250 g courgettes
100 ml milk
50 ml condensed milk
1 tsp powdered cardamom

1. Use a slicer or a spiraliser to make noodles of the courgette.
2. Boil the milk. Gently stir in the courgette noodles. Boil for 10 minutes.
3. Add condensed milk and cardamom powder and mix. Place silver vark (optional) on the halwa and serve hot.




Zucchini and carrot noodles are packed with flavour

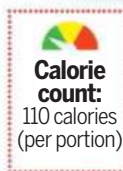
NOODLE SUBSTITUTE: ZUCCHINI AND CARROT

Zucchini and carrot noodles with cherry tomatoes and olives

SERVES: 2
PREP TIME: 10 minutes
COOKING TIME: 5 minutes

1 large zucchini
2 medium-sized carrots
2 tbsp olive oil
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1/2 tsp chilli flakes
100 g cherry tomatoes
10 g parsley, chopped
4 tsp basil leaves, chopped
salt and pepper, to taste

1. Use a slicer or spiraliser to make noodles of the zucchini and carrots. You could also use a peeler and shave thin slices of the vegetables to make pasta.
2. Heat oil in a pan. Add garlic, chilli flakes and cherry tomatoes. Sauté for about two minutes.
2. Add the zucchini and carrot noodles. Stir for a minute and add parsley and basil. Sauté for two minutes. Season with salt and pepper. 



A SYMPHONY WITH WINE

Chef Dennis Ridlon of Fifty Five East restaurant at the Grand Hyatt, Mumbai, whips up recipes from three different cuisines and suggests the best wine pairings for each of them.

By Upneet Pansare

CHINESE OPUS

SICHUAN CHESTNUT AND **CORN SALAD**

Pair it with: Selbach Riesling, Germany



HEALTHY SWAP:

Use extra virgin olive oil instead of sesame oil. You can also toast sesame seeds and sprinkle on the salad.

300 g water chestnuts, boiled
100 g corn, boiled
1 medium-sized carrot, chopped and boiled
20 g garlic, sliced

salt and pepper, to taste

1 tsp Sichuan peppercorn

5 ml oil

1 tsp dry red chillies, chopped

1 tsp spring onion, chopped

Calorie count:
90 calories
(per portion)

SERVES: 4 > PREP TIME: 10 minutes > COOKING TIME: 5 minutes

TO MAKE THE SICHUAN PEPPERCORN OIL

1. Roast peppercorns in a pan on medium heat until brown and aromatic. Let cool. Then coarsely crush them with a mortar and pestle.
2. Heat oil in a frying pan. Mix the crushed peppercorns with the oil and cook for a minute. Let cool. Strain the oil and keep aside.

TO MAKE THE SALAD

3. Heat a wok. Add Sichuan oil and sliced garlic. Fry till the garlic turns light brown.
4. Sauté chestnut and corn in the oil for one or two minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Garnish with red chillies and spring onion.

TIP: WHILE MAKING THE OIL, WAIT FOR PEPPERCORNS TO TURN A SHADE DARKER AND THEN TAKE THE PAN OFF THE HEAT.

ITALIAN INSTRUMENTAL

ROLLED BRUSCHETTA WITH SUNDRIED TOMATO VODKA SAUCE

Pair it with: Côtes du Rhône, Grenache, Syrah, France

200 g sundried tomatoes
30 g pine nuts
30 g garlic
olive oil
70 g Parmesan cheese, grated
20 g onions, very finely chopped
20 ml vodka
60 g tomato purée



HEALTHY SWAP:
Use crumbled feta cheese on the bread instead of fontina cheese. Feta has fewer calories.

60 g fresh cream
salt and pepper, to taste
12 ciabatta bread slices
12 fontina cheese slices
60 g ricotta cheese (or malai paneer) grated

Calorie count:
300 calories (per portion)

SERVES: 4 > PREP TIME: 15 minutes > COOKING TIME: 15 minutes

TO MAKE SUNDRIED TOMATO PESTO

1. Blend sundried tomatoes, pine nuts, garlic, 50 ml olive oil and 50 g Parmesan cheese into a fine paste. Season with salt.

TO MAKE THE VODKA SAUCE

2. Sauté onions in 30 ml olive oil till they turn translucent.
3. Deglaze with a little vodka and add tomato purée.
4. Bring to a gentle simmer and add cream. Simmer the sauce for five minutes. Add 20 g Parmesan cheese. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Pour the sauce through a strainer and keep aside.

TO ASSEMBLE

6. Brush a little olive oil on the bread slices and top them with slices of cheese. Mix the sundried tomato pesto with ricotta cheese and spread this paste on top of the bread slices.
7. Shallow fry the bread in oil until golden brown.
8. To serve, spoon some of the vodka sauce onto a plate. Place the fried ciabatta slices over the sauce and serve. ➤

TIP: NEVER POUR THE VODKA DIRECTLY FROM THE BOTTLE. IT CAN BE DANGEROUS. PUT IT INTO A GLASS BEFORE POURING IT INTO THE PAN.

DESI CRESCENDO

MADIRA SUBZ **KI GULLAR KEBAB**

Pair it with: Brancott, Marlborough, Pinot Noir, New Zealand

2 tbsp butter
60 g French beans, chopped
60 g carrots, diced
40 g button mushrooms, chopped
15 g ginger-garlic paste
10 g green chillies, chopped
5 g garam masala powder
salt, to taste
10 g roasted chana dal powder
15 g coriander leaves, chopped
10 g rum-infused raisins



HEALTHY SWAP:

Instead of frying, brush the stuffed balls with a little oil and bake them in an oven at 180°C for about 20 minutes.

20 g cheese, grated

15 g chopped cashew nuts, roasted

1 g shahi jeera

5 g garlic, chopped

5 g spring onion, chopped

Calorie count:
350 calories
(per portion)

SERVES: 4 > **PREP TIME:** 15 minutes > **COOKING TIME:** 10 minutes

1. Heat butter in a pan and add shahi jeera. Add chopped chillies and the ginger-garlic paste.
2. Add chopped vegetables. Cook till well done.
3. Add garam masala powder and roasted chana dal powder to the vegetables. Season with salt. The mixture will feel like a semi-hard dough. Add coriander leaves. Remove the pan from heat and let it cool.
4. Roll the mixture into lemon-sized balls and stuff them with cheese, cashews and rum-infused raisins.
5. Fry these in a pan till golden brown.
6. Serve with your choice of dipping sauce.

TIP: FOR A CRISPY TEXTURE, COAT THE VEGETABLE BALLS WITH BREADCRUMBS BEFORE FRYING.

princess of
all things shoes

3 am pillow-talk
philosopher

secret santa
of office peons

fastest blogger
in the east

For all the women you are
FEMINA



GOING ANOTHER WAY

Now, we're not the kind to impose bans. But the sheer number of travellers, touts and tourist traps in certain done-to-death vacation spots suggest that it may be time to skip the obvious.

Surprise yourself on your next vacation

CHANDRA TAAL LAKE IN SPITI

instead of Pangong lake

Thanks to movies like *3 Idiots* and *Jab Tak Hai Jaan*, Pangong lake has become popular with travellers from all over the country with many opting to check into luxury campsites offering panoramic views of the sapphire lake. But if you're someone who'd rather trek their way to an unexplored location renowned for its barren beauty, then head to the serene, crystal blue Chandra Taal lake situated at an altitude of 4,300 mt in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh.

The name Chandra Taal refers to the lake's crescent moon shape. Just like Pangong, the lake is deep blue, but changes hues with the changing colours of the sky. Boasting a circumference

of 2.5 km, it is the source of the Chandra river. The lake is surrounded by the Chandra Bhaga mountain range on one side and a magnificent cirque on the other.

A camper's paradise, Chandra Taal, popularly referred to as the Moon lake, is accessible on foot from Batal and Kunzum Pass.

A motorable road from Batal is 14 km away from Chandra Taal.

STAY: Try the government guesthouse or rent a room at Kunzum Pass and Batal. A majority of the tourists prefer staying in tents.

BEST TIME TO VISIT: June to mid-October

By Priya
Chaphekar

01



Buddhist stone chortens (shrines) at Chandra Taal lake in Spiti Valley

One of the main reasons behind Kasol being crowned the unofficial capital of backpackers is the ease with which one can acquire marijuana here.

Kasol lies in the Parvathy valley

02

KASOL *instead of Manali*

If you want to get away from the coochie-cooing couples of Manali, get off the bus at Bhuntar, about an hour before India's honeymoon capital, and head to Kasol.

This little gem lies in the Parvathy valley and attracts so many Israelis that even the signboards here are in Hebrew. Of course, one of the main reasons behind Kasol being crowned the unofficial capital of backpackers is the ease with which you can acquire marijuana here. Malana Village (from where Malana cream, said to be the finest variety of weed in the world, gets its name) is just a day's trek away.

There are several mini-treks to nearby villages such as Rasol, which cater to nature lovers. From

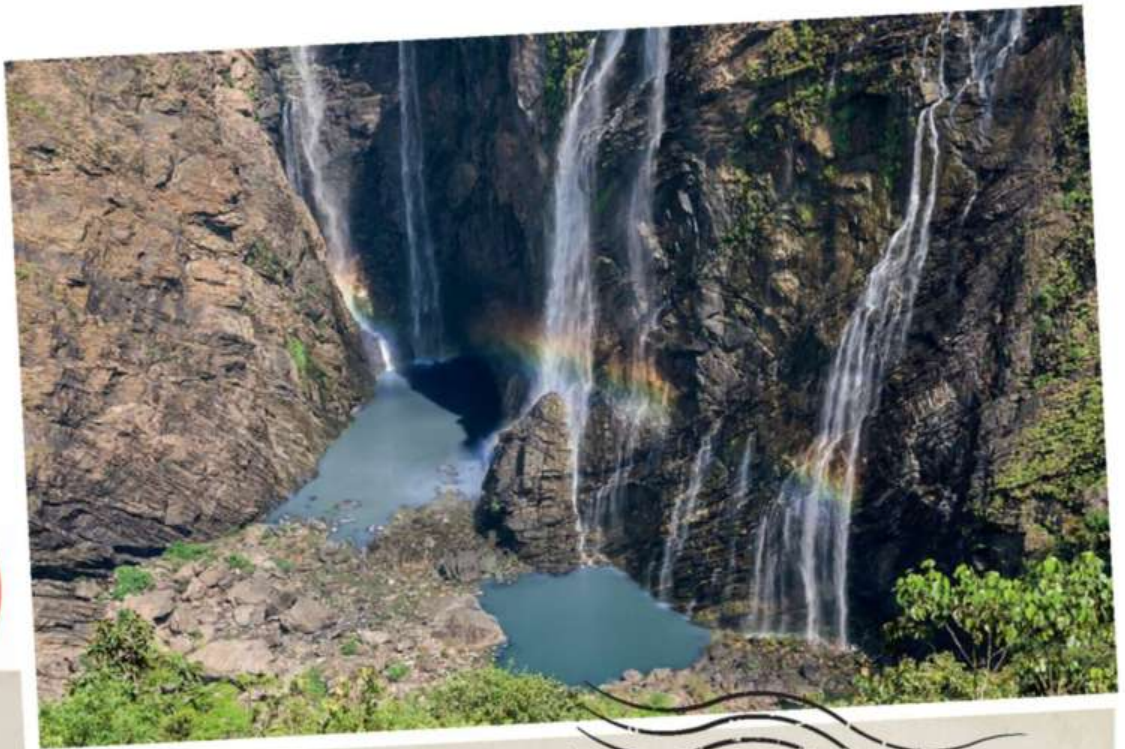
Kasol, a brisk 5 km walk takes you to Manikaran, which is known for its hot springs, and houses a gurudwara that attracts thousands of Sikhs every year. From Manikaran, you can hire a vehicle to take you up a winding road with such dangerous curves at every turn that the drive feels like a roller coaster ride. The road leads to Tosh, one of the prettiest villages in Himachal. Tosh is also the base for the popular Kheer Ganga trek—a refreshing day-long trek that leads you to some more hot springs.

STAY: There are plenty of options near the main market in Kasol.

BEST TIME TO VISIT: May to October >

By Deepa Suryanarayan

Jog Waterfalls is the second largest plunge waterfall in India; (below) tourists throng to see the waterfalls during monsoon



HONNEMARADU *instead of Coorg*

Situated on the backwaters of the Sharavathi river in Karnataka, Honnemaradu is a small tranquil village perched on hills that overlook the Linganamakki reservoir that stretches as far as the eye can see

and exudes its own special charm. In the middle of this huge water body is a small island that attracts campers. The campsite offers poetic views of sunrise and sunset. Campers can spend hours sitting by the bonfire and looking

up at the clear, starry skies. Honnemaradu derives its name from the Honne tree, but literally translates to golden lake.

The drive there offers breathtaking views of the hills that overlook the Linganamakki dam—the lush greenery of the Western Ghats on one side and huge waterfalls on the other. In addition to water sports like canoeing, coracling, wind rafting and kayaking, Honnemaradu is a birdwatcher's

paradise. You can spend hours watching, and trying to identify the large variety of birds including the European bee-eater, the fairy blue bird, ruby-cheeked bulbul and orange-headed ground thrush. A huge variety of butterfly species is also seen here. The enchanting Jog Falls, created by the Sharavathi river, is about 12 km away. Plummeling down from a height of 829 feet, it is the second highest

plunge waterfall in India, and a day trip you don't want to miss.

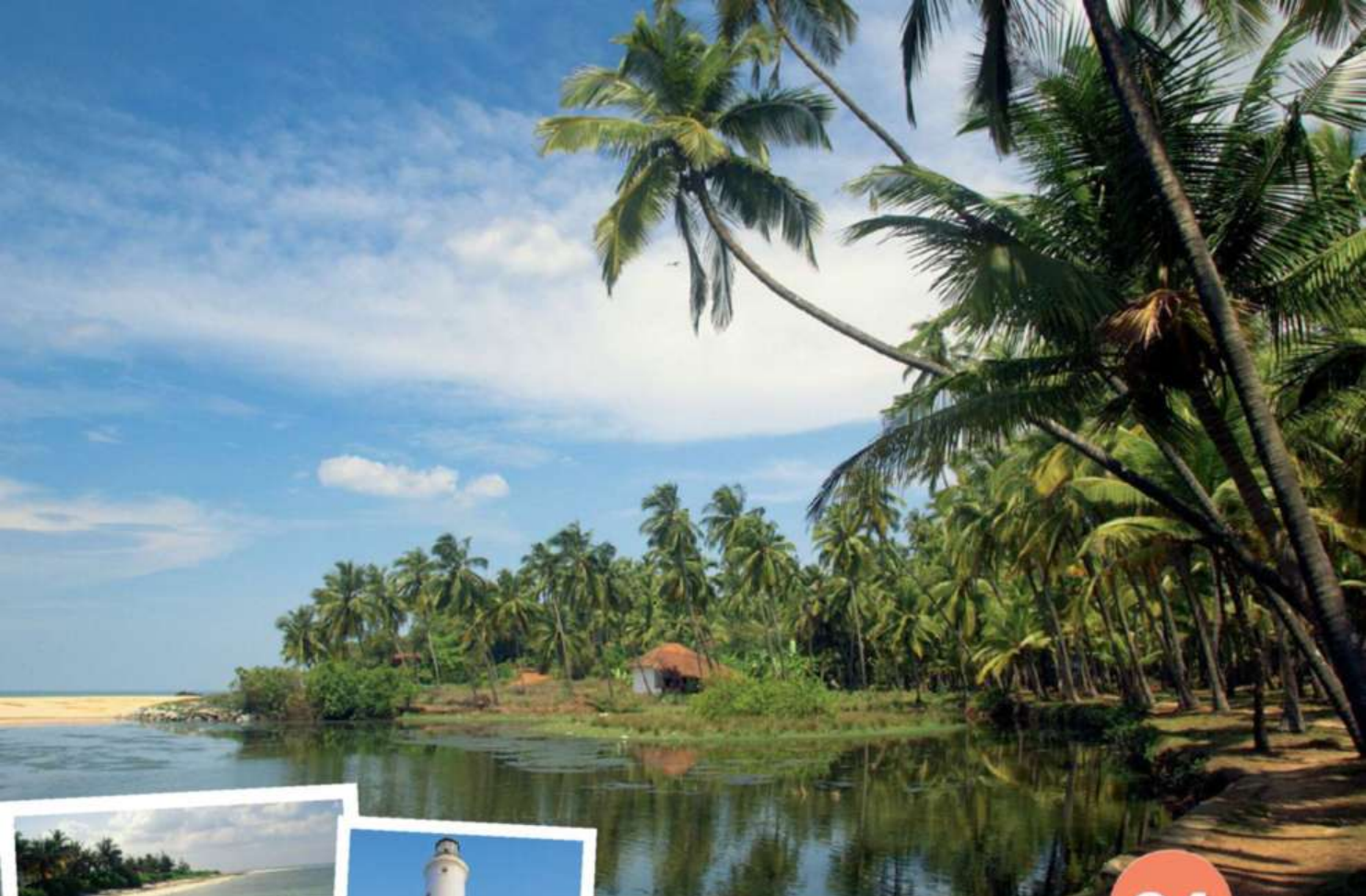
STAY: Since there are limited lodges and hotels in Honnemaradu, people usually opt for homestays. Kolavara Heritage, Gabadi River Edge and Bananki Homestay are some places that offer food and accommodation. Outdoor enthusiasts can look at camp stays like Adventurers.

BEST TIME TO VISIT: February to May, August to December

By Priya Chaphekar



Honnemmaradu is a birdwatcher's paradise. You can spend hours watching, and trying to identify the large variety of birds and butterflies here.



04

LAKSHADWEEP *instead of Goa*

These ecologically rare islands are a pristine haven for those who love the sun, sand and sea. You can spend your days sunbathing while reading a book or sipping a cocktail on the unexplored beaches. Dive into the aquamarine waters to explore the world underneath, consisting of mesmerising corals in infinite hues. If history is what appeals to you, visit the lighthouse at Minicoy Island, built in 1885. The coral debris at Kalpeni makes it a great

destination for reef-walking.

Agatti and Kadmat are paradise for those who love adventure sports. While Agatti island offers beautiful lagoons, full of ornamental fish and turtles, Kadmat island is known for its silver sand beaches and dense coconut palms. The island has a large beautiful lagoon of coral reefs where you can swim, scuba dive and snorkel.

When it comes to relaxing in Lakshadweep, you will be spoilt for choice. You

can sunbathe on Bangaram, a teardrop-shaped island with white sand and azure waters. Or, laze around in your hammock while admiring the breathtaking ocean, take a stroll on the silver sand beaches or just snuggle in a shady nook.

STAY: At beach resorts and homestays.

You can also look for government-run tourist huts at any of these islands.

BEST TIME TO VISIT: September to May >

By Priya
Chaphekar

(Clockwise from top)
A pristine beach in
Lakshadweep; Minicoy
lighthouse; boats at
Kadmat island

*While the island
of Agatti offers
beautiful lagoons,
full of ornamental
fish and turtles,
Kadmat is known for its
silver sand beaches and
dense coconut palms.*





05

NORTH SIKKIM

instead of west Sikkim

(Clockwise from top) Take a yak ride around Tsomgo (Changu) lake; Gurudongmar lake is a holy site for Sikhs and Buddhists; the Teesta river meanders through north Sikkim; a yak near Changu lake



Skip the accessible, and therefore overcrowded tea-estate hill stations of Pelling and Kalimpong, in west Sikkim, and instead head to the north, where brightly coloured rhododendron flowers mark your route, and amazing vistas of huge black, snow-covered mountains remind you of yummy slices of Black Forest cake.

Your first halt, obviously, would be Gangtok. Opt for a six-point day tour, which should cost up to ₹1,200 and will cover the view

points, as well as monasteries like Rumtek and Enchay. Prepare to travel on winding roads over the next two days as you slowly gain altitude. On day one, drive to Lachung (8,800 ft), and enjoy views of the meandering Teesta river. Yumthang Flower Valley*, located 25 km from Lachung* is the reason for your drive. Yumthang is a vast expanse lined with rhododendrons and more than 100 types of orchids, which bloom in different colours. Stay the night

at a homestay in Lachen* (9,800 ft)—this is necessary so your body can acclimatise itself to the high altitude of Gurudongmar lake*, which you can visit the next morning. One of the highest lakes in the world, located at an altitude of 17,800 ft or 5,430 m, this emerald lake is considered sacred by both Buddhists and Sikhs. The lake is located just 5 km south of the Chinese border, and hence, you will find the heavy presence of the Indian army here. They even stop your vehicle to check if you

are medically fit to proceed—the oxygen level at that altitude dips sharply, and tourists are allowed not more than half an hour at the lake. So you will travel for two days, for the pleasure of half an hour at Gurudongmar lake. Is it worth it? Totally!

But if the two-day drive on terrible country roads to Gurudongmar lake is too much for your back, visit the Tsomgo* (Changu) lake, which is about 40 km away from Gangtok.

*Permits may be required to visit some of the places mentioned here.

STAY: MG Road In Gangtok has plenty of options for all budgets.

BEST TIME TO VISIT: April, May, October and November

By Deepa
Suryanarayan

Gurudongmar is one of the highest lakes in the world, located at an altitude of 17,800 ft (5,430 m). This emerald lake is considered sacred by both Buddhists and Sikhs.

WORST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.
BEST CASE SCENARIO:
BEING LOST IN EUROPE.

WANTED: SKIPPER FOR A GIRL GANG
BACKPACKING THROUGH EUROPE.

If you're a Femina reader between 25 and 40, have a passport, and think you know Europe like the back of your hand, you could be leading a gang of girls on an all-expenses-paid, 15-day trip across Europe. Visit the Femina page on Facebook to win a spot on the next trip of the six we've lined up.



A juxtaposition of oriental culture and western heritage, Macau is where the traditional meets the modern. With so much to offer, it is no wonder that this former Portuguese colony in China is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Asia

THE HYBRID CITY



SERMON IN STONE

Visitors throng the ruins of St Paul's, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Macau. Originally built in 1580 by Jesuit priests, St Paul's was then the largest Christian church in Asia. After being ravaged by fire thrice between 1595 and 1835, all that remains of the church is the façade and the 66 steps leading to it. The façade is packed with decorative and nautical motifs, biblical images, mythological representations, Chinese characters and depictions of Japanese chrysanthemums, Portuguese ships and Chinese lions. The ruins of St Paul's were included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2005.





DANCE OF THE DRAGONS

This is a traditional Chinese dragon dance performed for the Mid-Autumn Festival held on the 15th day of the eighth month according to the lunar calendar. The festival is marked by celebrations across the city with parades and dragon dances. People worship the new moon and the gods with colourful lanterns and by making moon cakes, special traditional Chinese sweet flaky pastries with dense filling.



FUSION CUISINE

In the 16th century, Portuguese seafarers established a sea route to trade spices between east Asia and the West. As a result, Macanese cuisine evolved with strong Portuguese influences. Seen here is an egg tart, a popular local snack. It is an adaptation of the traditional Portuguese custard pastry, pastel de nata. It consists of a sweet custard filling in a flaky pastry.



OLÁ MACAU!

The 442-year-old Portuguese colonial rule over Macau ended in 1999, when the city and its over four lakh citizens were incorporated into the People's Republic of China as the Macau Special Administrative Region. But Portuguese culture is still a major influence on the locals here. Dressed in traditional Portuguese costumes, the residents of Macau perform folk dances in front of the ruins of St Paul during a local cultural dance festival. >



GAMBLING HAVEN

As night falls, Macau transforms into a glitzy, gambling, entertainment and party hub. Gambling accounts for over 50 per cent of the tourism economy and government revenue. Casinos in luxurious hotels and gaming rooms across the city are packed with people from all over the world.




WORSHIPPING A-MA

Popular with devotees and tourists, the A-Ma village is a cultural complex that celebrates the legend of the goddess of seafarers, A-Ma or Tin Hau. Goddess A-Ma is believed to have been born here more than a thousand years ago. The village has a bell tower, drum tower, the Tin Hau Palace, a museum and souvenir shops.



ON TOP OF THE WORLD

If you're seeking an adrenaline rush, take a stroll on the open walkway around the perimeter of the 233-metre Macau Tower. The walkway is 1.8 metres wide and does not have a handrail. Visitors are securely harnessed before they get on to the skywalk. 

INDIAN TRUNKS

We can never really get enough of antiquated trunks. They double up as storage and work the accent angle too. By **Naziya Sawant**



1. Wooden wine box, ₹3,500, **Serenity**
2. Vintage wooden trunk, ₹5,880 each, **CAC**
3. Painted box, ₹3,450, **CAC**
4. Cushion, ₹1,500, **AA**
5. Herring bone green throw, ₹2,900, **AA Living**
6. Blue wooden box, ₹2,750 (set of two), **Sanctum**
7. Circle painted box, ₹9,000, **Serenity**
8. Wooden box, ₹2,500, **Serenity**
9. Wooden partition, ₹21,500, **Sanctum**

(Facing page) 1. Orient express trunk, ₹31,000, **Portside Café** 2. Rome trunk, price on request, **Eastern Treasure Lifestyle** 3. New York trunk, price on request, **Eastern Treasure Lifestyle** 4. Floral suitcase, ₹2,250, **Marry me** 5. Madrid trunk, price on request, **Eastern Treasure Lifestyle** 6. Vintage cane trunk, ₹6,500, **Bungalow** 8 7. Red bed throw, ₹3,200, **AA Living** 8. Glass bottle, ₹1,950, **Sanctum** 9. Bottle, ₹1,250, **CAC** >

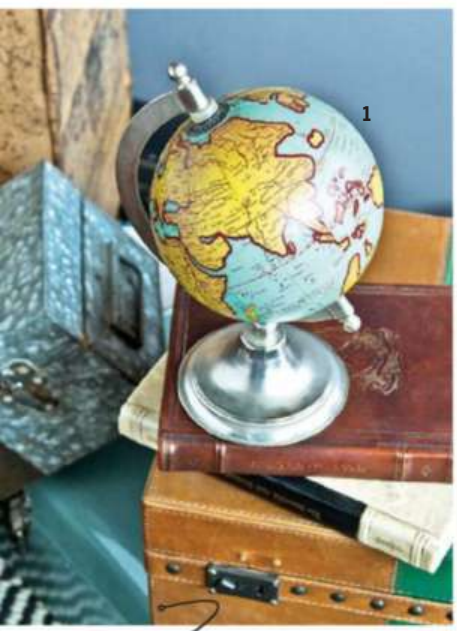
Vintage is so in, and these vintage wooden boxes are as pretty as they are functional. Lock away your treasured pieces or add beauty to your living areas.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

GoodHomes INDIA

Floral prints will add charm to the dullest corner. For some feminine style, stack floral-printed trunks along the bedside.





Modern, with a minimalistic vibe—if your taste in trunks leans towards leather and metals, these are great picks for your study area.

The world atlas is a common favourite, and makes the perfect addition in a home that tells of many travel tales.



1. Globe with stand, ₹2,590, Sanctum 2. Metal chest, ₹19,500, Bungalow 8 3. Candlestand, price on request, Eastern Treasure Lifestyle 4. Tan briefcase box, price on request, Eastern Treasure Lifestyle 5. Green metal trunk, ₹4,000, Sanctum 6. Cream rug, ₹5,500, AA living 7. Black iron box, ₹2,000, Serenity 8. Long tin box, ₹3,500, Serenity

A fatwa against creativity

A Mumbai-based Sunni Muslim group, the Raza Academy, issued a *fatwa* against Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi and Indian music composer A R Rahman, in September this year. The *fatwa* demands a rejection of Majidi's film, *Muhammad: Messenger of God*; the first in a trilogy on the life of Prophet Mohammad, citing that in the Prophet's own words, no picture of him be created or kept. It further claims that while the film itself makes a mockery of Islam, the Muslims working on the film—Majidi and Rahman—have to read the Kalma again on account of their blasphemous act. At a time when the country is already dealing with carpet banning by those in power, this *fatwa* resulted in an outrage.

QUOTE UNQUOTE



"I would invite all the religious figures, including the leaders in India, who have condemned the film to first watch it. I am sure if they see it with honesty and without pre-judgement, they will love the film."

Majid Majidi, acclaimed director



"Fatwa is a sexy term. It's juicy and interesting and it creates a counterpoint of Muslim communalism. If the Hindus have Bajrang Dal and the VHP, you also need some hate-mongering Muslim institutions to create a fine balance."

Javed Akhtar, lyricist

“My spiritual experiences while working on the film are very personal and I would prefer not to share these. We are indeed fortunate and blessed to live in a country like India where religious freedom is practised, and where the aim of all communities is to live in peace and harmony sans confusion and violence.”

—A R Rahman, music composer

FREIDA PINTO

The actor dishes on turning producer with a documentary, her plans to direct and what happened on the sets of *The Jungle Book*, to **Nairita Mukherjee**



Congratulations on the success of your documentary *Girl Rising: Woh Padegi, Woh Udegi*. Do you intend to produce more movies?

I'm in the process of producing one of my own (feature) films, where I'll be acting as well. I've been working on this project for almost four-and-a-half years now. It's very exciting, and at the same time, it's so nerve-wracking!

Do you have plans to direct as well?

Frankly, yes, I hope to be able to direct a short story in Hindi in phase two of Girl Rising campaign. I have a natural instinct when it comes to storytelling, and that led me to production in the first place. But I feel I have a lot to learn in terms of the craft.

We have to ask, have you signed any Bollywood films yet?

I've met some directors and producers and we've decided to come up with projects that match both our sensibilities. For example, Guneet Monga is doing some incredible work. So if all goes well, maybe in the future, you will see me in a Bollywood film. And even if I can't find a role that suits me, I just might produce it.

If that happens, will we see you in a typical Hindi entertainer?

It's definitely going to be a commercially viable film. Now, I'm only attracted towards cinema that isn't commercially viable or is a producer's nightmare. But I'll definitely make sure I balance my sensibilities and get practical about the box-office.

You will soon be seen in the Warner Brothers' version of *The Jungle Book*. Did working on the film take you down memory lane, considering we're a generation that grew up on the animated Hindi version of *The Jungle Book*?

I used to hum the title track from the series, *Jungle jungle baat chali hai*... and no one on the sets would get it. They would be like, 'What are you saying?' And I said, 'Never mind! Only a '90s kid who grew up in India would understand what that song means' (laughs). **F**

QUIRKY COOL

These stars kept things interesting with a bit of edge in their accessories



SHRADDHA KAPOOR TURNED THE LENS RIGHT BACK ON THE PAPARAZZI AT A MOVIE PREMIERE IN MUMBAI WITH A JUDITH LEIBER CAMERA MINAUDIERE.

MALAIKA ARORA KHAN WENT WILD WITH A BUG-PATTERNED RARA AVIS SLING AND A BUG BROOCH BY VINITA MICHAEL AT A GYM OPENING.

ESHA GUPTA ADDED A BIG 'POW' TO HER MONOCHROMATIC OUTFIT WITH A CRUNCH PERSPEX BOX CLUTCH FROM THE BRITISH BRAND, SKINNY DIP AT A PLAY.

SONAM KAPOOR GAVE HER GRAPHIC GOWN AN UPGRADE WITH A CRYSTAL BEATNIK CAT MINAUDIERE BY JUDITH LEIBER COUTURE AT A FEMINA EVENT.

TWINKLE KHANNA WENT TRIBAL AT HER BOOK LAUNCH, WITH A CELESTE NECKLACE BY MANISH ARORA FOR AMRAPALI AND A RAM'S HEAD FINGER RING.



“

IT'S ALL ABOUT QUIRKY THIS SEASON. A STATEMENT PIECE JUST ADDS SO MUCH VALUE TO A SIMPLE OUTFIT.

NISHKA LULLA, FASHION DESIGNER

”

KIAAN RAJ KAPOOR

Age: 5 years

You've got to admit he's got style. He was so reluctant to be photographed here that he simply covered his face with his hand, but gave us a brilliant picture in the process. Sources say that Kiaan isn't just camera shy, but will cry if he feels he is being pushed.

Recently, when Karisma Kapoor was being photographed with mum Babita and Kiaan outside Mumbai airport, she tried her best to coax him into smiling, but was visibly miffed when he refused to pay heed.



AARADHYA BACHCHAN

Age: 3 years

She was first photographed in 2011 when grandpa, Amitabh Bachchan, carried the newborn home from Mumbai's Seven Hills Hospital, wrapped in a pink blanket. Initially, the paparazzi tried relentlessly to catch a glimpse of her outside airports. Naturally, she didn't like the flashbulbs and the discomfort was evident on her face. But over the years, this little diva has grown quite camera-friendly and now even obliges with a cute smile.



AZAD RAO KHAN

Age: 3 years

Azad is extremely camera-friendly, so much so that he is the least self-conscious in front of photographers.

He was all over the papers last year after he tried kicking a ball around at his half-sister Ira's fund-raising celebrity football match. He sometimes appears moody, looking away from the camera, at other times he is seen flashing a full smile as was the case during this year's Eid celebrations in Mumbai.

Baby on BOARD

We round up Bollywood's most photographed celebrity kids. By **Nairita Mukherjee**



IMARA MALIK KHAN

Age: 1 year

Imara is cute as a button and looks absolutely adorable in every picture. She is such a happy child, that whenever shutterbugs call out her name coaxing her to pose for them, she happily obliges, flashing a smile.

RIAAN DESHMUKH

Age: Less than a year

We first saw Riaan when Riteish Deshmukh tweeted a photo of his six-month-old son, adding, "Riaan completes Us @geneliad." Since then, the new paparazzi favourite has often been spotted with his parents at various events.



AbRam KHAN

Age: 2 years

The paparazzi go into a clicking frenzy as soon as they spot the little Khan. Recently, SRK was filming a scene outside Mannat for *Fan*, in which he is prevented by fans from entering his own house. AbRam, who was pictured with his nanny, seemed amused at the whole fuss, and the outcome was incredibly cute pictures. 📷



WAR OF WORDS

Here's a roundup of social media battles that broke out on Twitter recently. By Nairita Mukherjee

ABHISHEK BACHCHAN AND A TROLL

Abhishek Bachchan had a nasty encounter on Twitter, where he was trolled by a follower who took things too far by tweeting a meme of Abhishek and Aaradhya, his daughter. Needless to say, it did not go down well with the actor who came out, all guns blazing, and put the guy in his place. After a long heated conversation, Abhishek successfully silenced the man, albeit with a little help from his fans, followers and friends from the industry.



Abhishek Bachchan @abhishekbachchan
 "@Mayankaryan084 you feeling better about yourself now??? Good! Glad to have been of service. Now go back to the hole you crawled out of."



SONAKSHI SINHA AND A TROLL

Referring to the proposed week-long ban on the slaughter and sale of meat in Mumbai, in relation to a Jain festival, Sonakshi Sinha expressed her opinion on Twitter. However, she was promptly trolled by many accusing her of having double standards, referring to an older tweet of hers on protecting animals and banning the sale of animal-tested cosmetics. One troll even brought in her father Shatrughan Sinha into the debate since he's a member of the party in power. Her response (above) was simply classic.

Ram Gopal Verma @rgvzoomin
 A director standing by his film rejected by the audience is like him telling a girl "I love myself and I don't care if you don't love me."

Anurag Kashyap @anuragkashyap72
 "@RGVzoomin sir i love you too much.. now put that Vodka aside and sleep.. lots of kisses"



Ram Gopal Verma @rgvzoomin
 "anuragkashyap72 well sir for ur info I stopped drinking ...I am not into kissing men but love you too"
 Anurag Kashyap @anuragkashyap72
 "@RGVzoomin then lets have filter coffee together soon to celebrate the AAG.."

RAM GOPAL VARMA AND ANURAG KASHYAP

Just a couple of days after the release of *Bombay Velvet*, director Anurag Kashyap poured his heart out on Facebook, talking about how he still believed in the movie and thanked his staff. After this, filmmaker Ram Gopal Verma and Anurag had an interesting chat on Twitter. Neither of them were going to be deterred easily, hence what we got was some intelligent word play.

TWINKLE KHANNA AND CHETAN BHAGAT

It all began when someone paid Twinkle a compliment on Twitter: "You are an amazing writer, you don't need to change your name to Chetali Bhagat," and Mrs Funnybones quickly brought Chetan Bhagat into the conversation. Chetan wasn't about to let this go easily, so he wrote back, referencing some of Twinkle's movie choices. And Twinkle's comeback was simple, "Well if u were taller, had more hair u could have got bobbydeol's role & if were way cooler, then Srk would be jobless:)."

Twinkle Khanna @twinklkhanna
 I do! He gets to judge Nach Baliye and I get to judge if that gross thing on my floor is dog puke or poop #SuchsLife



Chetan Bhagat @chetan_bhagat
 You nailed it.. It is YOLO.. Nobody offered me Barsaat, or Baadshah... Else you know..



TWINKLE KHANNA FROM HER WRITING DESK

At what point did you realise that films weren't for you?

There really wasn't a particular day but I started realising soon enough that I couldn't wait for my day to end and to rush back home. And perhaps that was really all it took for me to quit.

How do you tackle writer's block?

A deadline is my wrecking ball that works against blocks, walls and fortresses. I don't have the luxury of having a writer's block because I have to churn out a column a week, and honestly I work best under pressure.

How many drafts did you have to create for *Mrs Funnybones*?

Chiki Sarkar (publisher) edited the book and she is a hard taskmaster. I did at least 10-12 drafts. She also threw out 23 limericks that I had carefully devised for this book.



FROM BEING AN ACTOR TO A PUBLISHED AUTHOR, YOU'VE DABBLED IN VARIOUS THINGS. WOULD YOU CALL YOURSELF A RISK-TAKER?


I started out as an assistant to an interior decorator, and though I wanted to become a chartered accountant, I ended up as an actress. If being a risk-taker means being thick-headed enough not to worry about failures, then I guess I am one. Though, perhaps, not worrying too much about people's opinions helped me try things that may not have seemed sensible at first.

A writer often needs to be a good listener. Do you ever eavesdrop?
I talk to everyone and I love listening to stories. Once I accompanied a friend who was getting an MRI and, while I was waiting with the radiologist and his wife, I suddenly found myself in the middle of a marriage counselling session and it ended up in one of my columns.

Can you relate instances of your appetite for writing from your childhood?

As a child I loved reading and I still do. In school, I would walk around with this file of morbid poems and it had some strange sketches as well, of weird mirrors and three-legged tables. My mom gave me this special file. It was made of black felt and had an orange ribbon that held it together. I don't have it now; I hope to find it in an old carton someday. I had also written half a book about a young girl who lives with her grandmother, and then I didn't write a single word for 20 years.

Is it difficult to have a say as a writer in such intolerant times, when we are being censored at every step?

It does bother me a bit because I write satire. And being funny, even from the good old days of Laurel and Hardy, has always been based on silly things like accents and physical attributes. We didn't find it offensive then, but now in this (on the surface) politically correct world, which hides even more intolerance within, it is necessary to tip-toe around a lot of issues. 

—As told to Jayeeta Mazumder

FILMY FLASHBACK



Any incident from your days as an actor that makes you laugh now?

I remember shooting somewhere in south India in this filthy pink salwar kameez. I was on this tiny island and had been wanting to go to the bathroom for more than three hours, but there wasn't even a bush to go behind. Finally, I got into a boat with my hairdresser and started rowing frantically, almost capsizing, trying to get to another island to answer nature's call!